

ShopSmart[®]

Your guide to the best deals from **ConsumerReports[®]**



*Eat
healthy
for
Less!*

**The best deals on
organics and more**

Cover story

- 16 **Supermarket smarts**
Healthy eating trends worth trying—and what to skip. *
- 21 **Organics deals**
New products you'll love, plus our price scan. *

Departments

- 5 **Shop smarter this month**
The new Plenti points program, rebates made easier, and more!
- 7 **Shop talk**
New stuff we love A washer with a built-in sink, our top new detergent (it beat out Tide!), a yummy reduced-sugar yogurt, plus stuff to skip.
What's the deal with ... The 'ghost' economy—retailers' dirty secret.
Now you know Top-rated products staffers own and love.
Silly stuff A roundup of the silliest products we've ever seen.
Site to see Why you should join Jet, plus cool new apps.

In every issue

- 3 Editor's note
- 12 Ask our experts
- 14 Purse Smart: Financial products that can help you retire in style.
- 79 ShopSmart Extra: Easy new ways to save more at the grocery store.
- 84 Best of Back in the Day

* FEATURED ON OUR COVER



23

Where our secret shoppers found the best prices on organics.



57



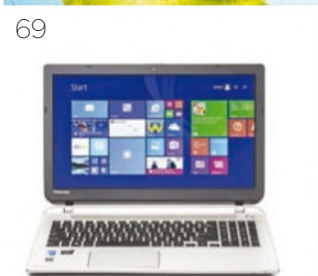
59



39



36



69



43



32



66

The Buying Guide ✓

Home & Yard

- 27 **What's cooking in kitchens** Cool trends in décor and appliances.
- 32 **Great green design** Turn your home into a lush, leafy oasis with these tips and plants.
- 36 **Take back your garage!** The best products for clearing out the clutter.
- 38 **Home news** Award-winning organizing tools, nail polish-inspired house paint, and more.

Food & Drink

- 39 **Better than water?** Read this before you buy any more sports drinks or flavored waters!
- 43 **5 surprising things about ...** Eggplant.
- 44 **That's deli food?** Transform supermarket takeout food into a delicious dinner.
- 46 **Food news** What you need to know about crunchy food claims, cooking steak, and more.

Health & Safety

- 47 **Eat-healthy help** Supermarkets are offering services to help you make healthier choices. We check them out.
- 52 **Check yourself!** Two products that can save your life.
- 54 **Hot new workouts to try** Get set to sweat!
- 57 **Health news** How to protect yourself from listeria, superbugs, and other scary stuff.

Beauty & Fashion

- 59 **A new way to buy clothes** These websites do the shopping for you. Are they worth a try?
- 64 **Great fall finds at Kohl's** Trendy tweeds, pretty peasant tops, and designer exclusives.
- 66 **ShopSmart shops with ...** Top skin doctors.

Cars & Tech

- 69 **Your best computer** Just pick what you want to pay, and we'll tell you how to get the most for your money.
- 74 **Tech smart** In our electronics guru's last column, she shares her best advice.
- 75 **Tech news** How to stop robocallers, check your Internet speed, and more!
- 76 **Best used cars under \$20k** Plus how to outsmart slimy salespeople.

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We shared the secrets to scoring the best coupons and every other trick in the bargain-hunting book.

Thank you!

We shopped until we dropped. It took nine years, but now it's time to pack our bags and head home. This will be our last issue, and like at the end of a great shopping trip, I feel sad that it's over but exhilarated by all of the goodies I picked up along the way. Like my mom says at the end of a productive day at the mall, "We accomplished!"

After 76 issues, I've learned everything I need to know to be a smart shopper. ShopSmart covered it all—from strategies for outsmarting car and mattress salespeople to tips for finding a bra or a body shaper that actually fits (and doesn't accentuate back flab!). We also shared the secrets to scoring the best coupons and every other trick in the bargain-hunting book. And we empowered you with info to keep your family safe. Yeah, I know, we sometimes scared the daylights out of you with warnings about toxic chemicals in your rice, tuna, soda, makeup, and even your own floors (see page 38). But the point of it all was to help you make the smartest choices every time you shop.

I hope you learned a lot (and saved tons of money while you were at it). We certainly learned from you. We were inspired by your tips, your stories, and, most of all, your support. So thanks to Marcia, Brenda, CrazyChicken, The Gabster, Oldfeet, and all of the rest of you who raved about us on Amazon and Facebook, and in our surveys. You're all part of the ShopSmart family, and I trust that you'll keep the spirit of smart shopping alive. I know I will. So if you hear a voice in the aisle saying, "Psst! Don't buy that one—buy this one!" or "Remember to use a coupon!" it just might be me.

Happy shopping!

Lisa Lee Freeman
Editor in Chief

Note to readers

Your ShopSmart subscription will be fulfilled by Consumer Reports magazine, so you can continue to get info you need to make smart choices.

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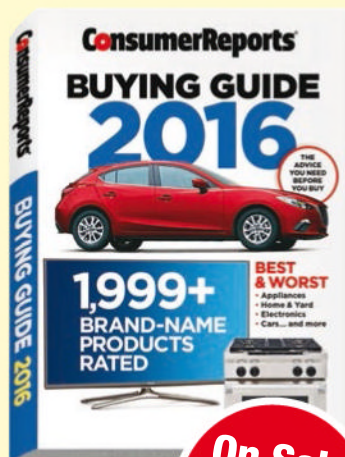
Our mission: to help you get the best deal every time you shop.

LOOK FOR THESE SYMBOLS INSIDE:

✔ EXPERT TESTED ✗ NOT SO HOT ⚠ DO NOT BUY

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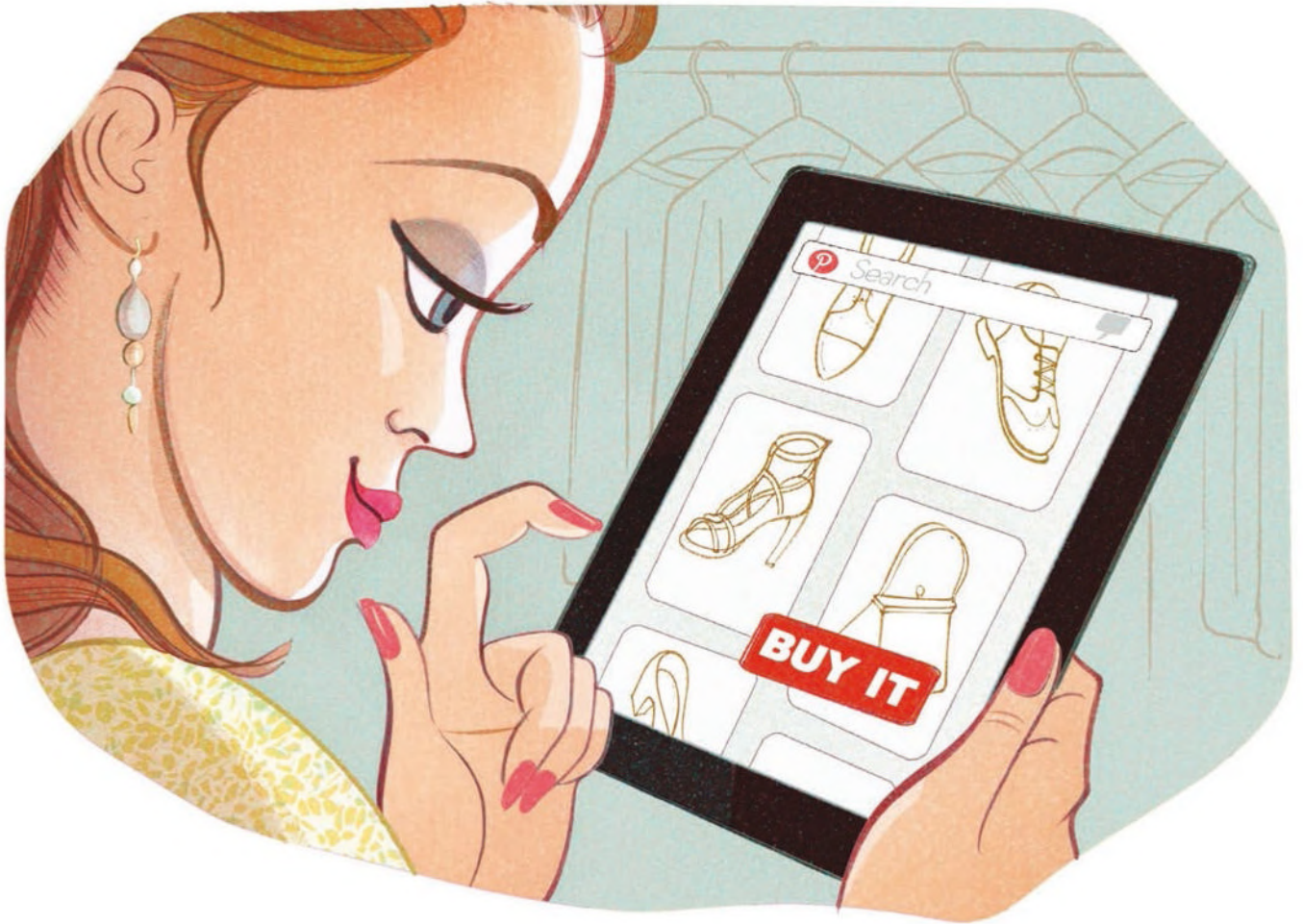
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5 ways to shop smarter

1 Get social-media deals.

The days of scouring the Web for the items you covet on Instagram and Pinterest are over; now you can shop directly in the apps. On Instagram, look for Shop Now buttons that let you buy items via links to company websites. On Pinterest, watch for Buyable Pins; simply tap “Buy It” to purchase items via Apple Pay or a credit card. Your personal info is saved, but card numbers aren’t stored in the app or shared with the seller. Participating retailers include Cole Haan, Michaels, and Nordstrom. Buyable Pins roll out to mobile Apple users first, then to Android and desktop users.



2 Skip the gym and still get fit.

If you like to mix things up when it comes to workouts, ClassPass is a way to stay in shape and save money. The service lets you pay a flat fee (\$79 to \$99 per month depending on your location) and go to as many classes at participating workout spots as you like, up to three times per month at the same studio. Do yoga one day, kickboxing the next. It's in 28 cities in the U.S. so far; sign up at classpass.com. And for some wild new workouts, turn to page 54.

3 Rack up rewards. The new Plenti program is free and gives points for shopping at a growing list of retailers, including AT&T, Enterprise, Hulu, Macy's, and Staples. Rack up 1,000 points and you get \$10 to spend. Link to some of your grocery-rewards cards to even earn more. Sign up at participating retailers or at plenti.com, or download the app. Another rewards app worth a download is Belly, which gives perks (free appetizer, anyone?) for spending money at local businesses, including 7-Eleven. Both are free for Android and Apple.

4 Get big-box bargains. Target and Walmart almost always have the lowest prices in our price scans. But there are more ways to save at those bargain emporiums. Get money to spend at Target by selling your still-stylish clothes at liketwice.com and choosing a gift card as payment. At Walmart, watch for a new service that gets you free three-day shipping on online orders for a \$50 annual fee. (Read about another new service on page 11.)

5 Reap those rebates. Mailing in rebate forms is a pain, especially if you forget to keep the receipt and packaging. A cool new feature on the RetailMeNot app makes it much easier. Just take a photo of your receipt from right in the app and you'll get eligible rebates in the form of an e-gift card or cash back via PayPal, both delivered directly to you by e-mail. Other new app features include hot products on deep discount. The app is free for Android and Apple.

Hot new stuff

You can pretreat stained clothes in the drop-down sink, which has its own cold-water jet. Then lift the sink and the items will fall into the tub for washing.

SAMSUNG WA52J8700AP WITH ACTIVE WASH TOP-LOADING WASHING MACHINE

Price \$960

Why it's hot This top-loader is the supporting player in a cute TV commercial in which the married-in-real-life celebrity couple Kristen Bell ("House of Lies") and Dax Shepard ("Parenthood") rinse some schmutz off their infant's toy bunny in the washer's built-in sink. Of course, cute doesn't cut it in our labs. But we like the washer's innovative design. It's the first one with this feature that we've seen, handy for doing overnight soaks on tough stains, especially if you don't want to tie up your kitchen or bathroom sink. We also like the SuperSpeed feature, which slashes normal cycle time (75 minutes for an 8-pound load) by about 20 percent. Most important, it got very good scores in our tough wash tests. So our laundry experts gave it a thumbs-up. Our only beef: The placement of the soap dispenser, especially when using powdered detergent, makes it tricky to fill.

Where to get it Best Buy, Home Depot

The blue bleach dispenser is easy to load. But the dispenser for detergent and fabric softener is harder to fill because the sink gets in the way.



The washer comes in white and platinum (shown).



More hot new stuff



ANTIGRAVITY BATTERIES XP-10 PORTABLE JUMP-STARTER

Price \$140

Why it's hot This cool little kit can jump-start your car and power up phones and computers in case of an emergency. In our tests, it got our weak and dead car batteries going most of the time, except when we chilled the unit and a car battery to simulate a freezing-cold day. And the maker warns that extreme heat, even the temp in a car on a hot day, isn't good for the kit's power source, a lithium-ion battery. So don't store it in a car.

Where to get it amazon.com, antigravitybatteries.com



YOPLAIT ORIGINAL REDUCED-SUGAR YOGURT

Price 60 cents per 6-ounce container

Why it's hot Kudos to General Mills for reducing the sugar in its original line of Yoplait by 25 percent without using artificial sweeteners. Even better, it's only 150 calories, and our tasters said it was even yummier than the old 170-calorie version based on blind taste tests of the French vanilla flavor.

Where to get it Supermarkets



PERSIL PROCLEAN POWER LIQUID 2 IN 1 LAUNDRY DETERGENT

Price \$17.97 per 150-ounce bottle (25 cents per load)

Why it's hot This new store brand from Walmart is our new cleaning champ! In our tests, Persil was even better at removing tough blood and red-wine stains than formerly top-rated Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release and Tide HE Plus Bleach Alternative. But it's no bargain; the premium price matches Tide's.

Where to get it Walmart

Plus stuff you can skip



XTRA PLUS OXICLEAN LAUNDRY DETERGENT, \$7.50 (6 CENTS PER LOAD)

The budget-friendly price is appealing, especially because the detergent comes with the claim that it powers out stains. But in our laundry tests, Xtra Plus OxiClean did a poor job at getting out grass and sweat stains.

ShopSmart says The best stain fighter for the money in our tests was Member's Mark Ultimate Clean from Sam's Club. It's 12 cents per load but still a great deal.



DEKTON BY COSENTINO COUNTERTOP, \$60 TO \$100 PER SQUARE FOOT, INSTALLED

This surface is an ultracompact mix of the materials used in glass, porcelain, and quartz surfaces. It was great at resisting damage from heat, stains, and cutting in our tests, but it chipped and cracked from edge to edge in tests that simulate a heavy pot falling on it.

ShopSmart says Go with quartz for a sleek look, but take care; edges and corners can chip.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH ...

The 'ghost' economy

Every time you order something online that never shows up, or you have to return a garment because it doesn't fit as described, or a store runs out of a hot item you've ordered, you're being haunted by the "ghost" economy. Those phantom purchases—and the retailer snafus that cause them—are the ghosts.

Researchers estimate that 25 percent of products on a typical retailer's website are out of stock (that shoots up to 30 percent around Christmas). Many other items exist but are mislabeled or described incorrectly. All told, the ghost economy costs companies about \$1.75 trillion worldwide in lost revenue each year.

The term "ghost economy" became a thing during last year's holiday rush, when shoppers tweeted their disappointments using the hashtag #ghosteconomy to shame companies for poor inventory control and customer service.

If you're haunted by ghost purchases, complain to the retailer; you just might spur large-scale change. The analytics company Order Dynamics reports that dozens of retailers are rethinking how they operate, adding services like product reservations and in-store pickup. And some are overhauling their inventory systems. For example, Walmart claims that its site is updated every 15 minutes rather than once daily like many other retailers. And Nordstrom's online and in-store stock are integrated, so that the retailer always knows exactly how many of that fab dress it has in stock and how soon it can ship.

So perhaps the best way to exorcise those shopping ghosts is to spend your money with companies that provide a positive customer experience. Money talks!

NOW YOU KNOW

A few of our favorite things Top-rated products that our staffers own and love

BLACK & DECKER FUSION BLADE DIGITAL BL1820SG-P BLENDER, \$50

Tammy Morton Fernandez, art director: My husband gave me this blender for Mother's Day because I love making smoothies. It does a great job of crushing ice, and the 20-ounce plastic to-go tumbler is the perfect size to take with me.



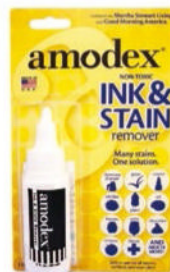
THE ORIGINAL PEDEGG PROFESSIONAL, \$12

Sue Perry, deputy editor: It's been a surprising money-saver, letting me stretch out the time between professional pedis!



ANKER ASTRO MINI, \$20

Wendy Greenfield, copy editor: This portable charger can revive any Android or Apple phone or tablet, and it's the size of a lipstick case!



AMODEX INK AND STAIN REMOVER, \$7 Pat Slaven, laundry and stain expert:

This product is surprisingly good at removing ballpoint and rollerball ink, one of the toughest stains. I keep some at the office.

SHARK PET PERFECT II HAND VAC, \$60

Scott Nyerges, managing editor: Its powerful suction keeps my dog's fur from flying, and its three attachable nozzles make cleaning anywhere a cinch.



THE SILLIEST SILLY STUFF

Our favorites!

Flamingo headband

When a camo headband just won't do.



It's a Squirrel Toilet Tattoo

Take a stand—or a seat—against boring bathrooms!



Snuggie Up Male Bathing Suit

Snuggie up to that?!



Car lashes Road (out)rage!

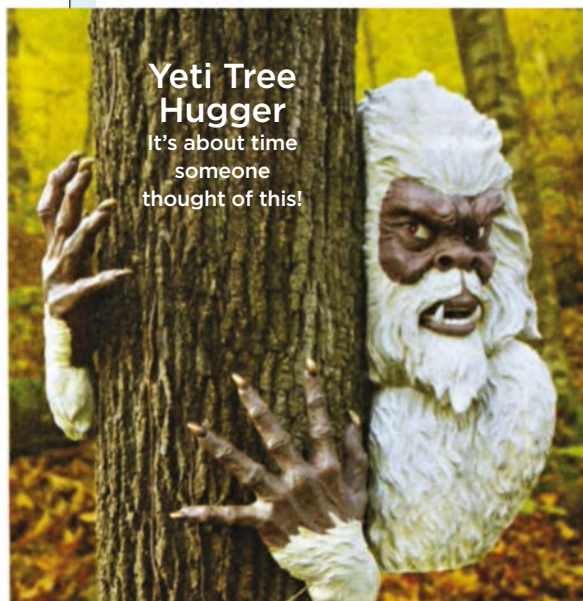


Hair Umbrella

Remove split ends—and your dignity.

Facewaver Exercise Mask

Did someone fart in here?



Yeti Tree Hugger

It's about time someone thought of this!



Egree Cat Hat

A hat for cat lovers (or haters?).

Humunga Stache

Not recommended for crotch sniffers.



SITE TO SEE

Save more on everyday essentials

Jet.com

Why you should check it out

Jet, a brand-new online shopping club, wants to save you money on everything you buy. Here's how it works: You pay \$49.99 for an annual membership, which gives you access to more than 10 million items, from toiletries and clothes to major appliances, all at super-discounted prices. Jet claims to make money from memberships alone, so its staffers work hard to source the cheapest items possible from retailers. As a result, the company says that members can expect to save 10 to 15 percent per order. In a spot-check of five items—paper towels, dog food, a swimsuit, sandals, and a TV—using the price-comparison search engine Google Shopping, Jet had the lowest prices each time. And here's the kicker: If you reach the end of a year's membership and haven't saved at least \$50, you'll get a refund for the difference between your membership fee and what you actually saved. Jet also offers a cash-back program, Jet Anywhere, that lets you earn JetCash for buying stuff from about 700 partner retailers. You can apply your rewards to future purchases on the site. We saw rebates ranging from 0.25 percent back at Tesla to

54 percent at Match.

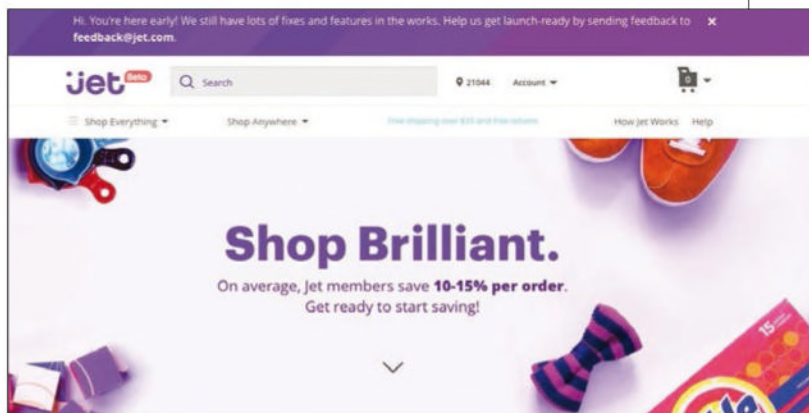
com. At press time, Jet was still in invite-only beta mode. But if you were previously a member of Hukkster (a price-notification tool acquired by the folks behind Jet) you can claim a free trial; check your e-mail for a message. Also, some companies have created partnerships that allow for early access; check with your human resources department. Or sign up at the site for an invitation when Jet formally launches.

Cool feature Jet's bonus savings alerts notify you when you can modify your order to save more money. For example, you can shave dollars off your total by buying items that ship from the same location, opting to use a low-fee payment method, or even waiving your right to returns (though damaged good can always be sent back). Waiving the right to return the shoes we priced could have saved us \$4.26, for example.

Price \$49.99 per year.

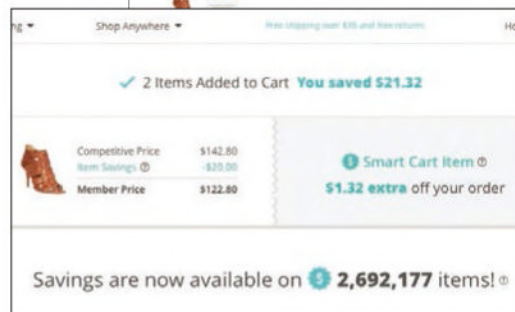
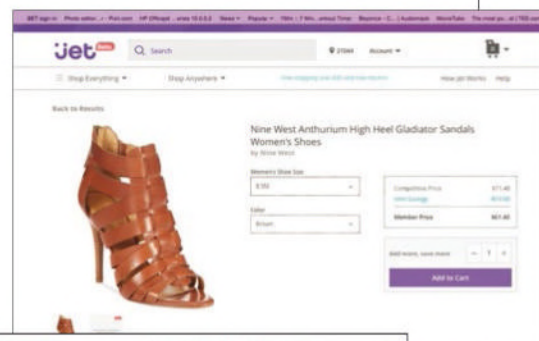
Shipping \$5.99; free for orders worth \$35 and above.

Returns Free within 30 days of delivery.



JOIN THE CLUB When it comes to ordering stuff online and having it delivered free, Jet offers a cheaper alternative to Amazon Prime. Jet is \$49.99 per year; Prime costs \$99, though the Amazon program offers perks like free video and music streaming.

These Nine West sandals were \$61.40. The next lowest price we found was \$84.99 on eBay.



FREE NEW APPS TO TRY



HBO NOW

Watch movies and every HBO show ever aired for \$14.99 per month, no cable service required; (7-day free trial).

Works on Apple.



EMERGENCY

This American Red Cross app watches the weather, relays tips, and alerts family in an emergency.

Works on Android, Apple.



POLYVORE REMIX

This virtual fashion stylist spotlights trending styles and helps you pull them together to create the perfect look.

Works on Apple.



SHADESCOUT

To copy the lip color your fave actress, just scan it to see (and buy) color matches from various brands.

Works on Android, Apple.

Q Should I get an extended warranty for my new car?

—Arlene Collins, via e-mail



OUR PANEL



Nikhil Hutheesing
financial expert



Chris Hendel
medical researcher



Christina Tetreault
legal adviser



Ellen Kiosz
food expert

In general, we don't recommend buying an extended warranty unless you plan to hang on to your vehicle for a long time after the original warranty runs out, says Nikhil Hutheesing, financial expert. An extended warranty can limit the financial risk of superexpensive repairs, but they're not cheap; the average cost is \$1,214. And many people who buy them never get their money's worth. According to our car owner-satisfaction surveys, the median out-of-pocket savings on repairs covered by an extended warranty was \$837, a net loss of more than \$375. Our advice: If you're planning to buy a new car, start by going to *ConsumerReports.org/cars*, the auto site run by our publisher, Consumer Reports. You can subscribe for \$6.95 per month and get access to the reliability track records of models you're considering. That information can help you improve your odds of finding

a car that won't need lots of repairs, so you can skip that extended warranty with confidence.

HEALTH WEBSITES YOU CAN TRUST

Q **What are the best health and medical advice sites for researching symptoms and drug interactions?**

—Lynne Flaherty, via e-mail

In general, you can trust sites of medical professional societies, such as the American Heart Association (*heart.org*) and the American Cancer Society (*cancer.org*), says medical researcher Chris Hendel. The same can be said for some websites operated by major hospitals, such as the Mayo Clinic (*mayoclinic.org*). Also, the National Library of Medicine's Medline Plus site is tough to beat (*nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus*). To look up drug info, check out Daily Med

(*dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed*), also from the NLM. And don't forget about three great sites operated by Consumer Reports. At *CRBestBuyDrugs.org*, you can find free advice on the best drugs to treat more than 35 medical conditions. For info about medical tests, check out *ConsumerHealthChoices.org*, and go to *ConsumerReports.org/health* for all kinds of helpful health news and info.

FAKE MAGAZINE-SUBSCRIPTION BILLS

Q **I think that I've been hoaxed by fraudulent magazine-subscription renewals. How do you know which ones are legit and which are bogus?**

—Catherine Shindle, via e-mail

There are several ways to spot a subscription scam, says Christina Tetreault, legal adviser. First, if you receive a renewal

notice in the mail, make sure that it has an expiration date that matches the one on your magazine mailing label. If the dates don't match—or if the expiration date isn't listed on the bill at all—that's a good indication that the bill may be bogus. The same goes for any kind of "cancellation fee" listed on the bill. Second, look at the sender's address. If it has been sent by an unfamiliar third party, it could be bogus. Third, check the bill for typos and misspellings; con artists can be poor spellers. Last, if you aren't sure about the bill you've received, call the magazine's subscription department, and use the phone number listed on the magazine's website or printed in the most recent issue you've received. Do not call the number on the billing notice you suspect is a hoax.

FOOD EXPIRATION DATES

Q What's the difference between 'sell by,' 'use by' and other terms on food packaging? Is it ever OK to eat something once the date has passed?

—*Camie MacIntosh, via e-mail*

Dates on food packaging are set by the manufacturer and are there to help stores determine how long to keep the product on shelves. They also let consumers know the date after which the manufacturer thinks the product will no longer be at peak quality. But it's not the last day a food can be safely eaten, says Ellen Klosz, one of our food experts. Texture and flavor may suffer after the use-by date when it comes to foods such as crackers, cereal, canned soup, and jarred pasta sauce, but they're still fine to eat.



Refrigerated foods should still be safe past the date if they have been handled properly and stored consistently at 40° F or colder. Of course, if any food smells or looks spoiled, don't eat it—even if it hasn't reached its use-by date. You can find info on specific foods on the Department of Agriculture's food-safety website, at fsis.usda.gov (search "food product dating"). You can also download the agency's FoodKeeper app, where you can search for shelf-life info on hundreds of foods.



TESTING 1-2-3

A few minutes with testing chief **Mark Connolly**

You oversee all of our tests, from scales to smartphones; how does your job affect your life at home?

Well, pretty much everything I own is something we've tested in our labs, so there's no room for impulse purchases, which can drive my family a little crazy. My wife recently bought a toaster, and it wasn't one that we tested—and it was horrible!—so we had her bring it back.

Any downside to the job?

Everyone asks me, "What's the best 'fill in the blank?'" It can be especially tough at parties!

What products coming into the labs are you most excited about?

Robotic lawn mowers have a lot of potential to be the next big thing, although I am keeping an eye on the safety issues. It would be nice to sit on the deck, drink a beer, and have my lawn mowed.

Tell us about the most special testing moment you've had recently?

I got to take home the Tesla last year. Definitely beat out the radar detectors, water filters, and lightbulbs I've brought home.

Buy financial security

Three products that can help you retire comfortably—or not



When you hear “major purchase,” a house, a car, or even a college education probably comes to mind. But some of the biggest purchases you can make are products designed to give you financial security in retirement.

What will “security” mean when you’re retired? Many people would say it’s all about regular income that never runs out. Social Security is that kind of income (see “Get a Fat Bonus From Social Security,” on the facing page). But Social Security covers only a portion of what most of us will need. And pensions, another source of regular income, are provided only by 8 percent of private-sector employers. So most of us will have to depend on our savings.

Tapping that concern, financial

companies are marketing a truckload of retirement-security products. Which ones are worth it? Here’s a list of three commonly promoted products. For each one, we’ll let you know whether you should green light it, proceed cautiously, or stop and run the other way.

ANNUITIES

These provide regular payments, kind of like a do-it-yourself pension. They’re insurance products that lock up your savings, so don’t devote more than 40 percent of your assets to them. And not all annuities are a good investment.

Fixed immediate annuity.

You pay a lump-sum premium and get guaranteed, monthly income right away. That’s useful if you want to let your other investments grow.



Deferred-income annuity.

You opt to have income start from two years to as long as 40 years after you initiate coverage. The longer you defer, the more you get later—a boon if you live a long time.



Variable annuity.

You decide how to invest your premium. Often, you can put some into an account paying a guaranteed, fixed interest rate and the rest into mutual funds, with earnings that aren’t guaranteed. But you can face some hefty fees, such as a “surrender charge” for leaving the investment early.

Other stuff you need to know:

■ Annuities grow tax-deferred—a bonus—but you’ll owe ordinary income tax on withdrawals. So before your purchase, consider talking to a CPA about tax planning.

■ Buy annuities only from insurers highly rated for financial strength by Weiss Ratings (weisswatchdog.com), which we’ve found to be more impartial than other ratings agencies.



REVERSE MORTGAGES

These loans let borrowers who are 62 or older get income by tapping the equity in their home. (They’re also called home equity conversion mortgages, or HECMs.) Before you borrow, you’re required to receive counseling from an agency approved by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to discuss eligibility, financial implications, and alternatives. Though you can talk on the phone for counseling, we suggest a face-to-face session (go to <https://entp.hud.gov/idapp/html/>

[hecm_agency_look.cfm](#) for info about local counseling agencies).

These loans can be lifesavers. But with origination fees, closing costs, and interest on the principal—among other expenses—they can be costly. If the borrower dies or leaves the home for 12 consecutive months or more, the loan may come due.

Other stuff you need to know:

- Calculate your ongoing expenses. If you can't keep up with homeowners insurance, property taxes, and maintenance, you could default and lose your home.
- Visit a financial adviser or CPA to review other options.



LONG-TERM-CARE INSURANCE

This coverage helps pay for nursing-home, assisted-living, and in-home care not covered by Medicaid, Medicare, or savings. Usually, you buy a monthly benefit—say, \$4,500—and a lifetime coverage limit. If your care costs less than that \$4,500 per month early on, you can use the remainder later when it costs more.

If you want to buy this coverage, you'll save by doing so early, for

example, before age 60. You can cut your premiums by choosing a longer “elimination period,” which is the initial period during which you pay out of pocket. Just keep in mind that premiums can rise significantly, and you can lose all of your benefits if you have to let your premiums lapse.

Most people with less than \$300,000 in financial assets—not including their home—don't buy this costly coverage, assuming Medicaid will cover their costs. Also, if you have more than about \$2 million in assets, you might decide that you can pay for your care out of pocket.

Other stuff you need to know:

- If you decide to buy a plan, look for coverage through a state partnership program. If your care costs exceed your private-insurance coverage, you don't have to spend down as much to qualify for Medicaid. Not all states offer this program; check with your state department of insurance.
- As with annuities, buy policies only from highly rated insurers. Because if the company goes under, you may be out of luck.

Steps to take right now

Retirement planning is crucial, whether you're married, single, divorced or widowed.

■ Estimate your retirement needs. Two calculators we like are AARP's ([aarp.org/work/retirement-planning/retirement_calculator.html](#)) and T. Rowe Price's ([www3.troweprice.com/ric/ricweb/public/ric.do](#)).

■ Know what you and your spouse (or ex) will get from Social Security. Go to [ssa.gov](#) or call 800-771-1213. You'll need names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers.

■ Start a retirement account. Don't have a 401(k)? If you earn a paycheck or are married to someone who does, you can start an IRA. The SEP IRA and SIMPLE IRA are for the self-employed; Publication 560 at [irs.gov](#) has info. The new myRA is for wage-earners; info can be found at [treasurydirect.gov](#).



GET A FAT BONUS FROM SOCIAL SECURITY

About half of people eligible for Social Security claim their benefits at the earliest possible age, 62. But for each year that you wait, your monthly benefit rises between 6.7 and 8.3 percent—a total of 76 percent between ages 62 and 70, the latest age you can claim. That incredible bonus costs you nothing but patience.

You can claim Social Security if you've worked and paid FICA taxes for at least 10 years. But even if you haven't, you may be able to claim a “spousal” benefit based on your spouse's work record (the

benefit applies to same-sex couples, too, if they are living in a state that recognizes their marriage). You also can time when you and your partner claim; by taking one benefit and letting the other grow over time, you can earn more as a couple.

Even if you're divorced, you can claim a spousal benefit off your ex's work record if both of you are 62 or older, you were married 10 years or more, and you have been divorced at least two years. Utilize a free “claiming strategies” tool at Financial Engines, at [corp.financialengines.com](#).

Supermarket SMARTS

*Trends that can help you
eat healthier and save
you time in the kitchen*

What's hot and what's not at the grocery store?

Though acai berries, kale, juice meals, and “low fat” label claims may be cooling off, gluten-free and non-GMO foods, Greek yogurt, and chia seeds keep going strong. Experts say that hot new food trends expected to gain momentum this year include meat alternatives, nut milks, hybrid fruits

and vegetables, and foods sweetened with new sugar substitutes such as monk fruit. For our special supermarket issue, we got the lowdown on up-and-coming food trends. And to sort out whether they're actually good for you—or just good marketing—we put nutrition experts on the case. Turns out many of them are worth a try—if you're smart about what you buy.

PHOTOS: KAT TEUTSCH; FOOD STYLING: MICHAEL PEDERSON; PROP STYLING: KARIN OLSEN; TYPOGRAPHY: MARY KATE MCDEVITT

Food makers are cutting calories with sweeteners claimed to be better for you.

Veggie protein-packed foods

WHAT'S NEW Rising prices and health concerns are causing more shoppers to look for meat alternatives. According to a new marketing survey, almost a third of consumers purchased a meat alternative in the past year. And thanks to an increase in foods made with plant protein from soy, peas, wheat, and legumes (think chickpeas and lentils), there are lots of meat-free choices to try.

EXAMPLES Boca claims its new **Boca Essentials** line of grain-and-vegetables-based burgers contain nine amino acids found in meat. **Beyond Meat's Beast Burger and chicken-free strips** are made with 100 percent plant protein. And Gardein's extensive line of soy-, wheat-, and pea-protein products include the new **Gardein Fishless Filet**. The new **Vitasoy Nasoya TofuBaked** line is

preseasoned and cooked tofu ready to slice into stir-fries and salads. And **Neat Egg** is a vegan egg replacement, made from chia seeds and garbanzo beans, that you just mix with water to add to recipes.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Yes, because many veggie-protein foods are good sources of fiber, says nutritionist Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D.N., author of "Read It Before You Eat It" (Plume, 2010). As with any processed food, scan labels to see what's inside, paying special attention to sodium content, which could be high.

THE CATCH You may find that ounce for ounce, some meat alternatives are no cheaper than meat. Also, if you're eating gluten-free, be aware: Wheat protein and seitan are other names for wheat gluten—the very thing you're trying to avoid.



Less sugar, more sweeteners

WHAT'S NEW Food manufacturers are scrambling to reduce the sugar in their products ahead of new nutritional labels that are expected to have an "added sugars" line. And many are forgoing out-of-favor artificial sweeteners and looking to plant-derived low-calorie sweeteners such as stevia, sugar alcohols such as erythritol and maltitol, and relative newcomer monk fruit extract, derived from the Chinese melon *luo han guo*.

EXAMPLES Beverages are leading the way. Even packet sweetener **In the Raw** has gotten into that act, launching its own line of lemonade, tea, and cola sweetened with a blend of In the Raw sugar and stevia.

Dole's No Sugar Added fruit bowls are sweetened with monk fruit extract; several Kashi cereals also have it. Low-cal desserts such as **Arctic Zero Fit Frozen Desserts' Chunky Pints** use a blend of monk fruit and cane sugar, and **Vitalicious baked goods** combine sugar, monk fruit, and rebiana (aka stevia). You can even buy the sweeteners in powdered form for eating or cooking: **Domino's Born Sweet Zing**, made of stevia and dextrose, and **Naturals**, from the makers of Equal, a blend of fructose, monk fruit, and stevia.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Maybe. If your aim is to cut calories without cutting out your favorite treats, these might be the ticket. The sweeteners also have a low glycemic index and are safe for diabetics.

THE CATCH Some sugar alcohols can cause intestinal distress, and many products have warning labels. Monk fruit extract is generally recognized as safe, but the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer watchdog group, suggests using caution because of poor testing in animals.



MEAT-FREE MANIA
There are lots of new ways to get a protein fix.

NOTE: We did not test the products shown.

COVER STORY



Look for healthy and tasty crossbred produce such as Kalettes and pluots.



Hybrid fruits and veggies

WHAT'S NEW Hybrids that marry two or more types of fruits or veggies, such as **Kalettes**, a combo of brussels sprouts and kale, are the new stars of the produce section. The secret to their success: catchy brand names and better marketing, says Kathy Means, a spokeswoman for the Produce Marketing Association.

EXAMPLES In addition to Kalettes, other brand names include **brusselkale**, **kale sprouts**, and **Lollipop Kale Sprouts**. **Broccoflower** mixes broccoli and cauliflower, and **Broccolini** crosses broccoli and Chinese kale. Hybrid fruit offerings include **pluots** and **plumcots** (plum-apricots), **cherry plums**, and **peacotums** (a peach-apricot-plum hybrid).

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Yes! Anything that will get you to eat more fruits and veggies and a greater variety of produce is a good thing.

THE CATCH None. But when you see them, stock up. Like any specialty fruit or veggie, they're seasonal, regional, and grown in far smaller quantities than traditional produce.

More choices for tea lovers

WHAT'S NEW The latest craze is matcha, a Japanese green tea reported to contain more EGCG (epigallocatechin-3-gallate)—an antioxidant that might protect against cancer and heart disease—than other green teas. It's sold loose and is showing up as an ingredient in everything from energy bars to ice cream. And beyond tea bags, manufacturers are competing to offer even more convenience. One industry source estimates that 10 percent of loose tea will be sold in capsules for use in single-serve coffeemakers by the end of this year.

EXAMPLES If you're new to matcha, check out the **Matcha Love** line of hot and cold teas, **Aiya's ready-to-drink Matcha to Go**, and **Jade Monk**

bottled matcha teas. Newcomers in single-serve packets include **Tazo Iced Tea K-Cups**, which are brewed over ice, and **Teablets**, which are pellets that you brew with hot water; the tea leaves sink to the bottom of your mug. They're basically loose tea in a tablet.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Yes. Plain, unsweetened tea (black or green) is calorie-free and may reduce health risks by providing protection against heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers.

THE CATCH Some ready-to-drink options and single-serve capsules are loaded with sugar. Read labels so that you know what you're sipping. Also, capsules for pod beverage makers aren't very eco-friendly and can be costly.



SWEET SOMETHINGS Check before you sip—some tea drinks are loaded with sugar.

NOT MILK? Nondairy alternatives are popular, but even fortified versions aren't as nutritious as the real thing.



Cow-free milks

WHAT'S NEW Soy and almond milks are crowding out regular milks in the dairy case, and now other plant- and nut-based drinks—made with coconut and cashew, for example—are elbowing into the space. Regular milk is also getting a makeover, with the introduction of Coca-Cola-backed **Fairlife**, a milk that has been filtered to concentrate the nutrients. Compared with the regular stuff, Fairlife is claimed to provide 50 percent more protein, 30 percent more calcium, half the sugar, and no lactose.

EXAMPLES New nondairy drinks include **Silk** and **So Delicious cashew milk**. Also look for **Pacific Foods organic coconut milk**, which joins a line of

other plant- and nut-based milks made from oats, hazelnut, and rice. **Califia Farms Almondmilk coffee creamers** are new from the almond and coconut products company. And check out **Daily Greens Hemp Milks**, made with hemp seeds, coconut water, and green veggies. Also new to the dairy case is **Dean Foods DairyPure milk**, the first nationally branded milk, which the label says is hormone- and antibiotic-free.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? That depends. The nondairy milks are perfect for anyone who is lactose-intolerant and can be great for variety if you like the taste. In terms of the super-charged Fairlife milk, “I can’t find fault in it, but

I don’t see a reason to seek it out,” says Keri Gans, R.D., author of “The Small Change Diet” (Gallery Books, 2011). “If you’re an athlete who needs to up your protein, this might be a way to get it. But the rest of us can get adequate protein from regular cow’s milk.”

THE CATCH Even with vitamin fortification, the nondairy milks simply aren’t as nutritious as cow’s milk. Soy, with its naturally occurring proteins, comes closest; the others have little to no protein, unless they’re fortified. The drinks may also contain added sugar and other additives, such as carrageenan, a thickener derived from algae that research suggests might cause gastrointestinal problems.

Better-for-you snacks

WHAT'S NEW The definition of “healthy snacking” has evolved from snacks that give you less guilt (think SnackWell’s) to ones that act more like mini-meals, with a balance of protein, carbs, and fats.

EXAMPLES In the refrigerated case, **Sargento Balanced Breaks**, **Boar’s Head Antipasto Packs**, and **Oscar Mayer’s P3 Portable Protein Packs** are all variations on the same theme: Think Lunchables for grown-ups. Each has some combo of cheese, nuts, meat, and/or dried fruit. Still-hot Greek yogurt now has added seeds, nuts, and grains, as in **Stonyfield Greek and Chia**, **Chobani Greek Yogurt Oats**, and **Yoplait Plenti** (with oats, flax, and pumpkin seeds). Also look for **Kind Popped bars**, which have a blend of six ancient grains added. And Kind has new big-brand competitors: Hershey and Mars are coming out with **Brookside Bars** and **Goodnessknows** snack squares, respectively, with fruit, nut, and oats in a dark-chocolate base.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Maybe. “The good news is that some snacks now use a wider variety of whole grains, beans, and more, that actually do make the snacks better for you,” says food-labeling expert Carol Harvey, owner of Palate Works, which is an advisory firm to the food industry and is based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Still, check labels—cured meat in snack packs, for example, can be high in saturated fat and sodium. And if the good-for-you grains, nuts, and seeds fall too far down the ingredients list, you’re getting too little of them to reap any real health benefits.

THE CATCH Snacks can be cheaper and fresher when made at home. Our testers assembled a combo of meat, reduced-fat cheese, and dry-roasted nuts similar to Oscar Mayer P3 Portable Protein Packs for as little as 80 cents—less than half of the price. And, hey, how hard is it to mix your own seeds, nuts, and/or oats into a carton of low-fat Greek yogurt?



Store-prepped entrées can be a lot healthier than pizza takeout—just be sure to read the ingredients list.

Restaurant-quality takeout meals

WHAT'S NEW To capture those 5 o'clock shoppers who make last-minute dinner decisions, grocery stores are offering more freshly prepared heat-and-eat meals than ever. Almost 43 percent of supermarkets have a trained chef on staff, according to a recent Supermarket News survey. And the offerings are looking less standard deli and a lot more gourmet. And many are healthy options to pizza or fried chicken. (See page 47 for more info.)

EXAMPLES Look for mains, sides, and whole meals made on-site, and more ethnic options. Many stores entrust their chefs to cook up a rotating menu based on what's in season. Check out the sampling we found at local stores in the New York metro area, above.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT? Maybe. “You can do quite well nutritionally, or not,” Gans says. “Look at the ingredients and the portion sizes—they could be too big, just like in a restaurant.” Laws regarding nutritional facts vary by state—at least until December, when a federal rule will require establishments with 20 or more locations to provide them. And even if they are available (you might have to ask), they’re based on a specific serving size of a test dish and may not reflect a chef’s heavy hand with oil or salt, or a generous serving spoon.

THE CATCH Prepared foods can be pricey. We bought chicken marsala, eggplant Parmesan, and meatloaf from a local Stop & Shop, then had our food experts make the dishes from scratch. When we compared price per portion, the chicken marsala cost \$1.94 less to make yourself; the eggplant Parmesan, \$1.36 less; and the meatloaf, 44 cents less. The homemade versions weren’t just cheaper; they also tasted better.



GUILT-FREE MUNCHIES
Many new
snacks are
balanced
mini-meals.

Organics Deals

What's new,
plus where
to shop and
save big

One of the biggest trends at the supermarket today is organics. According to a 2015 survey by the Organic Trade Association, 83 percent of households across the U.S. are buying organic food. In 2014 alone, organic food sales climbed 11 percent. Organic produce accounts for the biggest chunk of sales, almost 40 percent, and organic foods are nudging their way into more and more store aisles.

To help you shop smarter—and save a bit of money, too—check out our guide to what's new in organics. Then turn to page 23 to find out which stores sell organics for less, based on our latest secret-shopper price scan.

Cheaper produce

The price gap between organic and conventionally grown fruits and veggies is shrinking. "While 10 years ago there might have been a premium price for all organics, today in many stores, the price of some organics may be on par with the price of conventional produce," says Karen Caplan, CEO of Frieda's Specialty Produce. "It really depends on the product, the seasonality, and the retailers' philosophy."

What to look for Deals are particularly good on organic celery, cilantro, lettuce, and parsley, says Teri Gault, CEO and founder of The Grocery Game, a website that tracks prices. "On sale, we've seen organic celery, usually \$1.50, for \$1.15, bringing it closer to, if not lower than, the conventional price," she says. "Or you'll find \$5 organic salad mix at 20 to 25 percent off."

How to shop smarter Use your store loyalty cards, sign up for deals to get coupons, and check circulars.

More store-brand choices

Move over Whole Foods! With demand for organic food skyrocketing, many traditional grocery chains, big-box stores, and discount grocers are rolling out their own organic store brands at competitive prices (or even lower ones) than the name brands.

What to look for Kroger's almost three-year-old value-focused Simple Truth Organic line offers more than 280 organic foods for your fridge, freezer, and pantry. Walmart's partnership with Wild Oats is going stronger than ever, with about 3,800 stores now carrying the organic products at a claimed 25 percent less than comparable organic name brands. Target is adding 150 new products to its competitively priced Simply Balanced line this year. The store achieved its goal of increasing organic food offerings by 25 percent two years ahead of schedule. And the discount grocer Aldi, which stakes its reputation on selling its private-label foods for up to 50 percent less than name brands, launched its SimplyNature line last year, which has about 60 products.

How to shop smarter Always look for the USDA Organic symbol, because not every product that carries new private-label brand names is organic. Aldi, for example, says a "majority" of its SimplyNature products are; Target's Simply Balanced is about half.

Store brands from Aldi, Target, and Walmart can save you big bucks on organics.



COVER STORY

'Organic' on the label doesn't make these goodies nutritional superstars.



Mainstream food brands like Campbell's and General Mills are rolling out new organic lines or buying up old ones.



Organic sips can still have empty calories, sugars, or sweeteners.



Healthy-looking junk foods

Organic shoppers get the munchies, too. In the past year, the demand for organic snacks and candy grew over 14 percent, according to Spins, an organic food industry research firm. In the snack category, organic popcorn has grown 90 percent; chocolate and other candy are up 18 percent and almost 16 percent, respectively. Laura Batcha, CEO of the Organic Trade Association, says some of the growth in organic snacks has been driven by parents who think that the term "organic" also means there are restrictions on additives and sweeteners, which isn't necessarily true.

What to look for More brands of organic ready-to-eat popcorn are in stores, including G.H. Cretors and Popcornopolis, which launched organic products in 2014. The makers of Justin's organic peanut butter cups introduced a minicup version this year. Even old favorites like Jelly Belly are going organic. The company recently announced plans to introduce a new organic jelly-bean line and organic fruit snacks.

How to shop smarter Don't fall for the "health halo" on organic snacks. Junk food made with organic ingredients is still junk food. So go easy. Read labels and check for calories, fat, and sugar content.

Big-brand organics

What do Annie's Homegrown, Cascadian Farm, and Muir Glen have in common? They're all owned by General Mills. In fact, many of the big food manufacturers have been "greening" their offerings by quietly snapping up organic brands with loyal followings. Why so mum? "Big companies know that the most committed organic consumers don't have a lot of trust in them," says Phil Howard, an associate professor at Michigan State University who studies the food supply. Some large manufacturers have also launched their own organic lines as a way to build brand loyalty anew.

What to look for Campbell's introduced six organic soups under its own name this year, and it has owned the organic line of Wolfgang Puck soups since 2013. ConAgra recently bought Blake's All Natural Foods, which produces organic frozen meals, and Hormel Foods now owns Applegate Farms, a leading manufacturer of organic prepared meat.

How to shop smarter If you're concerned about who owns what, check out Howard's website, at msu.edu/~howardp, which lists the major food companies and their organic-brand alliances. Then look into the parent company's track record. Howard cites reduced commitments to organics, GMO interests, and ingredient sourcing from China as potential causes for concern.

'Green' drinks

Shoppers are thirsty for organic beverages. According to Spins, there has been double-digit growth across basically every category including juices, bottled teas, and soda in the past year. "We're seeing a move away from added sugars," says C.E. Pugh, COO of National Cooperative Grocers, an association whose members are some of the largest organic-food retailers. "But people still want great-tasting cold beverages." So many new offerings rely on the sweetness of juice or no-calorie sweeteners like stevia and sugar alcohols including erythritol.

What to look for Grimmway Farms, producers of Cal-Organic produce, introduced its True line of fruit and vegetable juices late last year. Honest Tea continues to grow, transitioning its no-cal Honest Fizz soda to organic, and adding new organic bottled herbal teas, sweetened and not. Veri Soda's "low calorie" (60 per can) organic formula gets its sweetness from a blend of cane sugar and stevia.

How to shop smarter Organic beverages can still be loaded with calories. Check labels and serving sizes, so that you know what you're getting if you down a whole bottle. Though nutrient-rich, some True juices have 140 calories per 8-ounce serving, the same as in a 12-ounce can of soda.

Buy organics for less

Yes, you'll usually pay more for organics, but maybe not as much as you might think. Organic produce costs 49 percent more, on average, than conventional. But if you shop at the right stores, you can do much better. To find the best deals, we sent our secret shoppers to stores throughout the U.S. to price a grocery list of items, looking for comparable products in organic and conventional versions. Our shoppers hit Target,

Trader Joe's, Walmart, and Whole Foods, as well as their local supermarkets. They priced all kinds of items, including fresh, frozen, and canned produce, and other staples like chicken, eggs, and milk. We looked for things you could find in many different places, but we noticed that certain organic products were hard to find sometimes.

So if you want to eat organic, you might have to be flexible about what you buy depending on what's in stock

and what's in season. But in the end, we got good news: Organics don't always cost a ton more than conventional items. In fact, our shoppers sometimes paid *less* for organics when they were on sale.

As for everyday prices, we found differences of as little as a 3 percent premium for organics. But we also found that sometimes you'll pay more than 200 percent more! Read on to see a sampling of what our shoppers found.

SMALLEST PRICE PREMIUM



3% more*

Sweet potatoes
\$1.29/POUND for conventional
VS.
\$1.33/POUND for organic

Next smallest premiums

- 4% more for canned, diced tomatoes at a Publix in Tampa, Fla.
- 8% more for frozen strawberries at a Stop & Shop in Levittown, N.Y.
- 9% more for frozen green beans at a Whole Foods in Westbury, N.Y.

BIGGEST PRICE PREMIUM



249% more*

Black beans
77 CENTS/15-OUNCE CAN for conventional
VS.
\$2.69/15-OUNCE CAN for organic

Next biggest premiums

- 162% for chicken thighs at a Safeway in Phoenix.
- 161% for a gallon of milk at a Trader Joe's in Rochester, N.Y.
- 156% more for a gallon of milk at a Safeway in Phoenix.

*The fresh sweet potatoes were from a Wegmans in Rochester, N.Y. The canned black beans were from a Target in Oxnard, Calif.

WHERE WE FOUND IT CHEAPEST


Below are the lowest prices we found for each organic item in our scan. Items are shown with the retailer where we found them. Each price is from a single store.

Supermarkets	Trader Joe's	Walmart	Whole Foods	Target
 <p>fresh carrots 85 CENTS/POUND (Safeway)</p>	 <p>black beans \$1.19/ 15-OUNCE CAN</p>	 <p>cut green beans 68 CENTS/ 14.5-OUNCE CAN</p>	 <p>frozen green beans \$1.35/POUND</p>	 <p>Eggland's Best organic eggs \$4.99/DOZEN</p>
 <p>fresh sweet potatoes \$1.33/POUND (Wegmans)</p>	 <p>chicken drumsticks \$1.99/POUND</p>	 <p>whole kernel corn 88 CENTS/ 15-OUNCE CAN</p>	 <p>frozen mango \$3.99/POUND</p>	<p>If you really want to save the max on organics, it might be worth hitting a few different stores.</p>
 <p>chicken thighs \$1.97/POUND (H-E-B)</p>	 <p>chicken (whole fryer) \$1.99/POUND</p>	 <p>diced tomatoes \$1.68 CENTS/ 28-OUNCE CAN</p>		
 <p>fresh grape tomatoes \$3.29/POUND (Publix)</p>	 <p>frozen strawberries \$3.32/POUND</p>			
 <p>milk \$5.99/GALLON (Publix)</p>				

Buying Guide

The best from our tests

199 PRODUCTS TESTED  101 SMART PICKS



Sports drinks and flavored water can seem like they're good for you, but some have surprising ingredients you might want to avoid. To see what's really in that stuff, turn to page 39.

**HOME
& YARD**
p. 27

**FOOD
& DRINK**
p. 39

**HEALTH
& SAFETY**
p. 47

**BEAUTY
& FASHION**
p. 59

**CARS
& TECH**
p. 69

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What's cooking in kitchens

5 hot design trends

Modern is edging out traditional in kitchens. More cabinets and appliances have sleek handleless designs—and some even open with a knock of your fist. And more appliance features from commercial restaurants are making their way into home kitchens. Those are just some of the innovations that our home editors and appliance testers have spotted lately at trade shows and in our labs. Whether you're thinking of a full-scale renovation or simply looking to spice up your kitchen with a few upgrades, check out these new products and design ideas:



MAD FOR MOD
This quartz counter looks like trendy concrete.



TREND Fabulous faux surfaces

Designer kitchens with marble countertops and hardwood floors look great in magazines, but the reality is those materials are high maintenance. Marble is susceptible to red wine stains and etching from lemon juice. And hardwood floors can show every scratch. But thanks to new innovations in manufacturing, you can get the look of luxe stone and real wood in lower-maintenance materials.

■ **Stone look-alike** Quartz has been around for a while, but the style options have become truly stunning, including patterns that are the spitting image of natural stone. "Marble used to be out of reach for anyone with kids, or even people who entertained a lot, because of the staining," says Courtney Cachet, a celebrity designer based in New York. "Thanks to quartz, you can get the look of marble without the upkeep." Concrete is another vulnerable, yet visually interesting material that you can mimic in quartz. For example, Caesarstone recently launched three concrete-inspired quartz colors—Fresh

Concrete, Sleek Concrete, and Raw Concrete—that look like the real thing but resist heat, staining, and abrasions.

■ **Patterned laminates** Hard-wearing laminate countertops have also gone more luxe. Formica has partnered with designer Jonathan Adler to launch cool new patterns such as Lacquered Linen, which looks like fabric but is glossy, and Greek Key, a timeless motif made modern in bold colors including orange and bright blue.

■ **Luxury vinyl flooring** It comes in convincing wood patterns and delivered impressive dent resistance in our lab tests. Vinyl is also available in realistic stone and slate designs, including the top pick in our flooring tests, Tarkett's NAFCO PermaStone Collection—Natural Slate-Sand Stone NS-660, about \$4.70 per square foot.

■ **Weathered wood finishes** If you'd prefer to go for the real thing, check out Armstrong's American Scrape Oak Brown Bear, \$7 per square foot, which does a good job of concealing tiny scratches.

TREND Chic custom looks

There's never been such a thing as the one-size-fits-all kitchen. Manufacturers are finally coming out with more customizable appliances that can be mixed and matched according to your needs.

■ **Trendy appliance columns** At the higher end, the big trend is in "column" refrigerators and freezers, which separate the two appliances, allowing you to place them wherever you like in the kitchen. The fact that consumers are buying more fresh food than ever is a factor here, and columnization lets you play with the ratio of fridge to freezer space in the kitchen. For example, you might pair a larger fridge, say, a 30-inch model, with a smaller freezer, maybe 18 inches wide. Big into wine? Column wine chillers are getting popular as well. But the look isn't cheap: A suite of all three appliances could set you back around \$15,000.

■ **Mix-and-match organization** The personalization trend is also impacting more reasonably priced appliances. For example, Frigidaire's new Gallery top-freezer, \$1,000, has the first in-door organization system that can be configured 100 different ways. The unit also comes with features not common on top-freezers, including LED lighting and smudge-proof stainless steel. And in our tests, it delivered very good temperature control and superb energy efficiency.

■ **Hideaway microwave ovens** The microwave is also on the move—from its usual countertop or over-the-range location to a less conspicuous spot; for example, it can be built into an island or a base cabinet,



HAVE IT YOUR WAY Some new fridges have customizable organization systems, and microwaves can be tucked under counters to free up counter space.

which saves counter space. "People still like the utility of a microwave, but they don't want it to make a visual impact," says Jeffrey Sears, CEO of Pirch, a kitchen and bath retailer. Sharp's 2015 line of microwave drawers, like the one shown at right, are some of the sleekest we've seen, featuring a hidden control panel that opens only when you need it. The units start at \$1,300.



SEARCHING FOR INSPIRATION?

To keep up with the latest design trends, here are 9 blogs that our experts turn to:

- **REMODELISTA.** It has tons of beauty shots and sources for finding the products shown.
- **MYFIXITUPLIFE.** This blog specializes in helpful DIY videos, plus it has a fun weekly podcast.
- **HOZZ.** You'll find countless photos of actual renovations, plus links to the pros who did the work.
- **DESIGN MILK.** This is the go-to authority on modern design.
- **THE PEAK OF CHIC.** Jennifer Boles has been called the bloggers' blogger because her site contains so much insider info.
- **RAMBLING RENOVATORS.** This blog chronicles the transformation of a traditional 1950s brick home.
- **DESIGNTRIPPER.** It's easy to spend hours on this site, which combines travel and design.
- **APARTMENT THERAPY.** We love the house tour section, plus the amazing before and after pics.
- **FRESHOME.** This design and architecture site has a nice international flavor and scope.

TREND Cool industrial styling

Viking launched the first commercial-grade range for home use in 1987, and restaurants have been a source of inspiration for appliance makers ever since. Some new features we're seeing include the following:

■ **French-door wall ovens** One of our favorite recent commercial imports is the French-door wall oven, which pro chefs rely on when juggling multiple pots. One of our favorites is the GE Café Series CT9070SHSS, \$3,900, which shined in our baking and broiling tests. You can open both doors at once with one hand, and the oven can be controlled wirelessly from a smartphone. BlueStar also expanded its line of French-door wall ovens, which are available in gas or electric in more than 750 colors.

■ **Water-bath cooking** Another cool restaurant-style feature, the Sous Vide Accessory,

is available on the GE Profile, GE Café, and GE Monogram induction cooktops, \$1,600 to \$2,600. Pronounced "soo-veed," this cooking method means "under vacuum" in French, and it's basically cooking food in a vacuum-sealed bag in a temperature-controlled water bath. GE's version has a wireless temperature probe, shown above, that clips to a pot and communicates with the cooktop via Bluetooth to control the bath's temperature so that your poached eggs or fish filets don't overcook.

■ **Restaurant-style ice** True Refrigeration's undercounter Clear Ice Machine, \$3,500, cranks out an impressive 70 pounds per day. The clear cubes come in the shape of a top hat, which is supposed to prevent clumping, and the interior LED lighting systems lets you choose from 14 colors.

POT BOILER
GE's sous vide temperature probe keeps poaching liquid temperatures just right.



EASY OPENER
French doors make loading and unloading food a snap.



BRIGHT IDEA
The Ikea Utrusta LED countertop light, \$55, has handy hooks for pot holders and utensils.



TREND Smart work zones

Connectivity is one of the biggest buzzwords in home design, especially in the kitchen. We're seeing more Wi-Fi-enabled appliances, big and small, including coffeemakers, slow cookers, wall ovens, and ranges.

■ **Ranges that take orders** Dacor, the California-based appliance manufacturer, came out with the first connected range—the Discovery IQ Dual-Fuel Range—a couple of years back. This year, Dacor added a built-in Android tablet with a remote app that accepts voice commands. That means if you're in another part of the home and want to turn down the heat on a lasagna or roast, you simply speak the command into your phone. Very cool—but at \$12,000, the convenience doesn't come cheap.

■ **Innovative lighting** Designers are working more moderately priced technologies into the kitchen, including light controls that boost work zone functionality. Ikea, for example, is doing more integrated lighting with its cabinetry, including undercabinet LED fixtures with a built-in plug for countertop appliances and a USB port to charge your smartphone and other electronics.

TREND

Contemporary style

There's a movement away from traditional kitchens, with their decorative moldings and racks of hanging copper pots. Sleek and contemporary is the hot new look, thanks to a wave of hands-free technologies that strip away the excess.

■ **Smooth, no-knob doors** Several cabinetmakers have gone knob-free. Elmwood Fine Custom Cabinetry's "touch-to-open" coplanar doors are motorized to open and close when you tap gently or use the handheld remote control. German manufacturer Bauformat's "Climber" glass upper cabinet features a louver design that responds when you wave your hand across a sensor located under the unit. And instead of pulling on a lever, you simply knock twice on Miele's Generation 6000 line of dishwashers, with their patented "Knock2Open" technology.

■ **Hands-free faucets** We're also seeing more hands-free kitchen faucets, perfect for when your fingers are a mess from meal prep. Moen expanded its MotionSense line to its STo and Align pull-down kitchen faucets, which both offer modern styling. Their advanced sensor identifies when an object, such as a pot or your hand, is under the spout and runs water for as long as it's there.



MINIMALIST MARVELS
Sleek, knob-free doors on cabinets and appliances are a hot new look in kitchens.

Skip extended warranties; they're not worth it.

SHOULD YOU BUY LARGE APPLIANCES ONLINE?

Buying a small appliance—say, a blender or toaster—online is one thing, but what about big-ticket items, such as a fridge or washing machine? In a recent survey, in which we asked more than 21,000 readers to tell us about their appliance shopping experiences in the last year, only 11 percent of respondents said they took the plunge and bought a major appliance online. It can be a money-saving strategy, but keep these tips in mind:

TAXES USUALLY APPLY. Though you might be able to save on shipping, don't count on the purchase being tax-free. The rules are complicated and vary by state, so the best policy is to assume that the tax will be included.

IT STILL PAYS TO SHOP IN STORES. Spending a few thousand bucks on a fridge, range, or other high-priced appliance without first seeing it in person can be a pricey leap of faith. That's why we recommend a hands-on visit to a store showroom before you make a big purchase online. Be on the lookout for flimsy parts, tricky-to-handle controls, or other flaws that could be annoying, especially on appliances that you use every day.

ALWAYS TRY TO GET A BETTER DEAL. It's not quite as easy as walking up to a salesperson in the store, but once you get through to the right customer-service rep (either by phone or online chat), it's worth asking whether the price is negotiable. In our national reader survey, people who haggled spent about \$100 less on their appliance purchase.



Buy it all here!

Ready for a new kitchen? We checked out the one-stop kitchen-planning services offered by Home Depot, Ikea, Lowe's, and the upscale specialty kitchen and bath retailer Pirsch. For sheer convenience, you can't beat buying everything from cabinets to flooring in one location, but we found that each retailer varies in what it carries, what you have to get elsewhere, and which services the store does itself and which are assigned to outside contractors. Price estimates, except where noted, include cabinets, countertops, flooring, sink, faucet, fridge, range, and dishwasher.

■ HOME DEPOT

What it costs Expect to pay \$25,000 or more with installation for a complete 10-by-10-foot kitchen (the industry standard used for comparison pricing). In-home measurements cost \$49 to \$99 but are deducted when you commit to the project.

Estimated time Three to 10 weeks.

How it works First, use the My Kitchen Planner software on Home Depot's website to rough out your plans. Then schedule time with a store designer (many are certified by the National Kitchen and Bath Association) to help you pick products and fine-tune the plan. The software lets the designer and client "talk" online so that you can do a lot of that remotely. A store pro comes to your house to take measurements, and labor (done by vetted, third-party contractors) is guaranteed for a year.

Bummer Though Home Depot sells everything from cabinets to flooring, stores are limited in what they can display. You may have to find what you're looking for on the website.

■ IKEA

What it costs A 10-by-10-foot kitchen starts at \$3,000, but that doesn't include flooring or installation, which is performed by vetted outside

contractors but warranted by Ikea for five years.

Estimated time About seven weeks.

How it works Use the store's Home Planner software to add cabinets, countertops, and more to a 3D plan of your space. In-store specialists, who sometimes have design training, can help with the software.

Bummers Though you can see everything the store sells in person, Ikea has a sparser inventory than Home Depot or Lowe's, and it's mostly Ikea-branded products, including a limited selection of appliances. It doesn't sell flooring. And pro measurements are available only if you're within driving distance of an Ikea; the fee is \$99 for the first 4 hours, which is deducted if you commit.

■ LOWE'S

What it costs About \$20,000 or more with installation for a complete 10-by-10-foot kitchen. In-home measurements cost \$75 but are deducted when you commit.

Estimated time About nine weeks if you start with a fair idea of what you want.

How it works Make an appointment with a Lowe's-trained designer, many of whom often have design backgrounds, and you'll be led through the store's appliance, cabinet, countertop, and flooring options. A store pro takes measurements in your home, and labor (done by vetted contractors) is guaranteed for a year.

Bummers You'll find more appliance choices than at Home Depot but fewer



KITCHEN CALLS
A Lowe's pro can guide you through choices.

kitchen furnishings. And each individual store is limited to what it can display.

■ PIRCH

What it costs Complete kitchens, much larger than 10-by-10 feet, start at \$25,000 but can run many times that, depending on your budget.

Estimated time Depends on the project.

How it works Pirsch estimates that customers spend about 2 hours browsing in one of their eight showrooms around the country. Each has working products and full-time chefs and other pros showing off what each model can do. The retailer carries no in-store inventory other than what's used for demos, but whatever you and your designer want, Pirsch can supply it—even if it includes appliances you'll find at your local home center. And the store's technicians deliver and install products, making them the go-to place if you have a problem during or after the warranty period. Manufacturers, in fact, will extend appliance warranties for a year when you buy from Pirsch.

Bummer The store has no designers, but it will either work with yours or recommend one.



BARGAIN BUY
You can buy an Ikea kitchen for as little as \$3,000.

Great green design

Plants are a cheap and easy way to freshen up any room; here's how the pros do it

Spend some time browsing the rooms on Houzz or any design magazine and you'll notice that the most appealing spaces have one thing in common: something green.

"You can have the most gorgeously decorated space, but until you add something green and living—a plant, a tree, or just some cut flowers—it can look dull," says design and garden writer Tovah Martin, author of "The Indestructible Houseplant" (Timber Press, 2015). Use houseplants to add an eye-catching design element—just as you would a pillow or a piece of art—to fill an empty space, or to create a focal point. Our three-step plan can help you choose the right plants for your home and find the perfect spot for them.

Black thumb? Turn to page 34 to find out about trendy new faux plants—you'll be amazed at how real they look.

Step 1: Pick the right plants

"If you choose something that's super-easy to care for—I call them the indestructibles—you can get a great look without much effort," Martin says. Here are her top picks.



SUCCULENTS They don't need much water, so they're easy to maintain. Pick a more architectural style like agave or aloe for a stand-alone piece, or cluster a group of variously colored miniatures in a low planter or tray.

PHOTO: FANG ZHOU/GETTY IMAGES



FERNS If you need to fill an empty spot in a traditional space, lush, leafy ferns on plant stands or end tables are the way to go. But be prepared to water often. Ferns dry out easily.



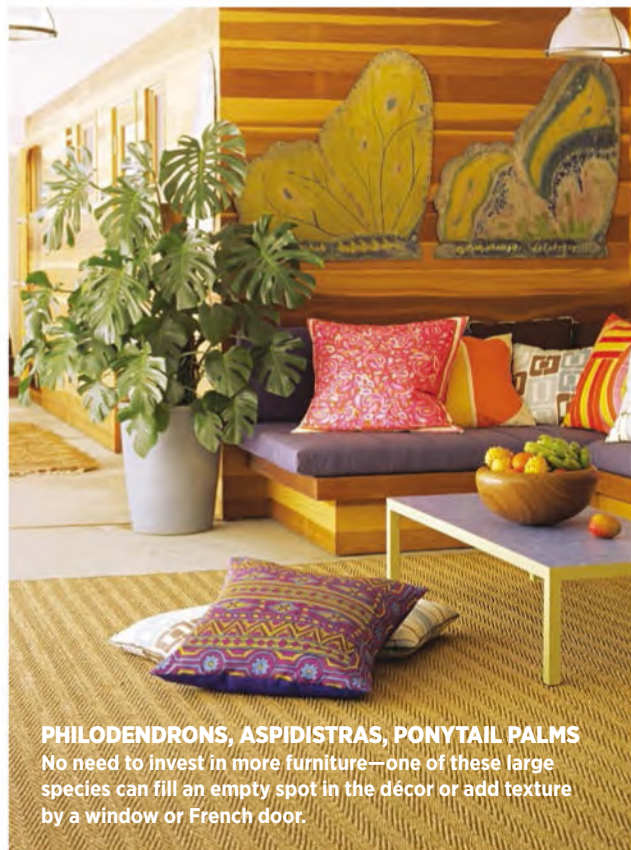
SPIDER PLANT With delicate trailing leaves, these are great for hanging pots or for the top of a bookcase, where the tendrils can cascade down. For a fresh take on the old favorite, consider a new variety, “Bonnie,” which has curly leaves.



CHRISTMAS CACTUS These fleshy, pale green plants look great on a shelf where you’ll be able to appreciate the red blooms they produce during the holiday season.



GERANIUMS, AFRICAN VIOLETS Add a pop of color to a sofa table or side table with a small collection of these easy-care plants, both of which offer continuous year-round blooms in a range of colors.



PHILODENDRONS, ASPIDISTRAS, PONYTAIL PALMS No need to invest in more furniture—one of these large species can fill an empty spot in the décor or add texture by a window or French door.



MOTHER-IN-LAW’S TONGUE A row of sleek planters filled with these spiky, vertical favorites can make a strong, contemporary statement.



AIR PLANTS Perfect for clear glass planters and terrariums, these modern marvels don’t need any soil and not much light. Just water once per week.



HOYAS For shelves or tabletops in indirect-light areas, try these easy classics.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JEREMY HOPLEY/GETTY IMAGES; CLIVE NICHOLS/CORBIS; CHRISTINA SCHMIDHOFFER/GETTY IMAGES; BREE MERCER/GETTY IMAGES; ISTOCK; TOSHAI/DREAMSTIME.COM; VERITY WELSTEAD/GETTY IMAGES; MELANIE ACEVEDO/GETTY IMAGES

Step 2: Pot properly

“You can pick up a cheap plant at the supermarket, then repot it in a decorative planter to give it a designer look,” Martin says. Or shop online for the widest selection. (See “Where to Shop,” on the next page.) Also, follow these tips to make sure you choose the best container—and spot in your room—for your greenery:

■ **Use the right size.** Let proportion guide you. The plant shouldn’t look top-heavy or bottom-heavy when nestled in the pot. A too-small pot will dry out quickly, requiring frequent watering, and a too-large pot will drain too slowly, possibly rotting the roots of the plant. “Avoid anything that tapers too much (it can dry roots) or that has a bean-pot shape (tough for transplanting),” Martin advises.



FLOWER POWER
A trio of flowering plants in simple pots softens a stark wall.

■ **Choose the best style.** Match the plant to the pot. A cactus might look strange in a pot with an Italianate pattern, for example. Also think about the impact you want the planter to make. Do you want it to stand out or blend in to your space?

■ **Give it a healthy home.** “Terracotta is always a great choice, and it’s good for the plant because it breathes,” Martin says. If you’re repurposing a container and using it as a planter, such as a vintage watering can, be sure you can drill drainage holes to keep the plant healthy.

THE RULES OF USING FAKE PLANTS



Shown: Faux potted knobby succulent, \$50, potterybarn.com.

If you don’t have time to water or you worry that your plants will be demolished by kids and pets, don’t give up. Many of the latest faux plants look surprisingly real. We know what you’re thinking: Tacky! But believe it or not, faux greenery has come a long way in recent years because many manufacturers have replaced “silk” (actually polyester) with ethylene vinyl acetate, or EVA, which can look remarkably lifelike, according to Kamilla Najdek, a floral designer in Millerton, N.Y.

Here are the do’s and don’ts of using faux foliage in your home:

1. Don’t cheap out. Frayed edges or unrealistic coloring are telltale signs of fakery. If you can find really good reproductions, you can even tuck them into live plant arrangements in your home, Najdek says. “It has

a dramatic effect, and clients are amazed; they can’t tell the difference between the two,” she says.

2. Do park your plant in the right spot. Artificial greenery is ideal for low-light settings, where it may be hard to maintain a live plant, Najdek says. But never place a faux plant someplace a live one couldn’t grow, she adds. “That’s a surefire way to make it scream ‘fake.’”

3. Don’t ignore them. Even though they’re fake, they still need attention. Dust all of your faux plants regularly with a microfiber or lambswool duster, or use an aerosol duster for intricate-leaved plants, and wash with water yearly.

4. Do shop smart for faux plants. We spotted some fabulous fakes at Pottery Barn, One Kings Lane, and Silkflowers.com.

Step 3: Park it in the right spot

■ **Seek out the sun.** “For plants that need plenty of light, choose a place where they will receive as much direct sunshine as possible,” Martin says. “Plants look great lined up in front of a window.” Low-light species, such as air plants, will be fine in darker areas. Turn all plants each time you water them to ensure even light exposure.

■ **Make a statement.** Place your plant where it will be seen. A large plant or small tree can hold its own in a corner or behind a piece of furniture, but something small and intricate, such as miniature succulents, are better where you can see them close-up, like on a coffee table or as a dining table centerpiece. Also, remember that you’ll have to water and dust your plants, so make sure they’re easy to reach.

■ **Don’t make a mess.** Some plants can shed leaves, and it’s easy to splash water. You can buy pot lifts to raise plants several inches off the floor so that you can easily wipe up spills. Also, if you have a large pot or tree, consider a pot or tray with casters, Martin suggests. “You can move it if you rearrange the room for a party—or if you just want a change of scene.”



LEAFY ACCENT
Adding a large plant is a great way to fill a bare spot in a room.

Where to shop

Sure, you can spend hundreds on gorgeous indoor planters. But before you do, check out these sources for the stylish—and nicely priced—finds shown here and on the facing page.

homedepot.com, lowes.com

BEST FOR A wide selection.

These home-improvement giants have large garden centers, complete with a variety of plastic, resin, clay, and ceramic indoor/outdoor pots at every price.

SHIPPING Varies per order; both sites offer free store pickup. At *homedepot.com*, shipping is free on orders of \$45 and more.

RETURNS 90 days from purchase for most items at both sites.

Shown: Allen + Roth ceramic indoor/outdoor planter, \$15, *lowes.com*.



overstock.com, tjmaxx.com, homegoods.com

BEST FOR Designer looks on a budget.

The selection changes constantly, so these sources can be hit or miss. But you can strike it big with low prices on high-end designer planters.

SHIPPING Overstock has free shipping on orders of \$50 and more; T.J.Maxx, on \$75 and more. Home Goods products are available only in stores.

RETURNS 30 days at all three.



Shown: Papaja 5-inch pots, \$2 each, Ikea (stores only).

target.com, ikea.com

BEST FOR Bargain prices.

At Ikea large basket-weave planters start at just \$6. At Target we found classic Grecian urns for around \$14 and ceramic floor planters in gorgeous colors for less than \$40.

SHIPPING Target has free shipping on orders of \$25 and more; Ikea’s rates start at \$10.

RETURNS 90 days at both sites.

crateandbarrel.com, cb2.com, westelm.com, shopterrain.com

BEST FOR Large-sized pots and containers.

Not every item from these sites fits the “budget” category, but if you’re looking for large, stylish containers for tall indoor plants or trees, all four sites offer a nice selection. Terrain, which specializes in handmade clay, slate, and teak planters, also offers hanging planters and low, shallow bowls for succulents. Hit the sale section of the sites for high-style options at great prices.

SHIPPING Starts at \$5 at Crate & Barrel, CB2, and West Elm; \$7 at Terrain.

RETURNS 90 days at Crate & Barrel and CB2; 30 days at West Elm and Terrain.



Shown: Bennie low vase-planter, \$20, *cb2.com*.

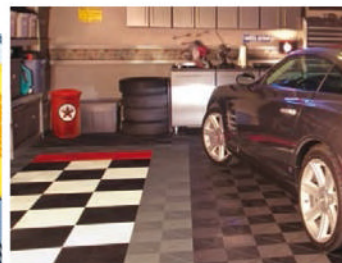
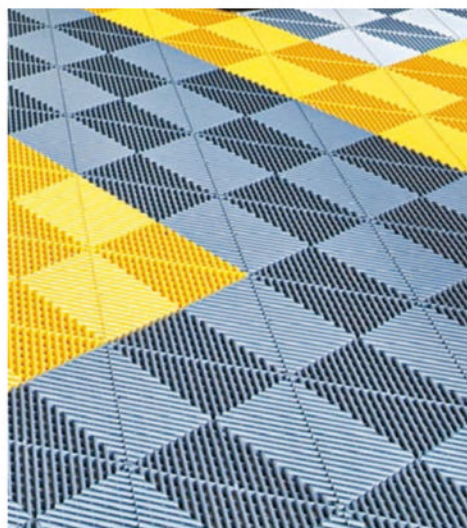
Take back your garage!

Pro organizers' favorite products and tips for cutting clutter

Your bedroom closets, kitchen cabinets—and maybe even your spice rack—might reflect your inner neatnik, but what about your garage? Odds are it's a dumping ground, says Collette Shine, a professional organizer in New York City and owner of Organize and Shine. The garage isn't treated with the respect it deserves, in part because it's often a pass-through space, not like a living room or kitchen where people spend

time. As a result, she says, organization happens more haphazardly.

The root of the clutter problem, according to Shine and other organizing pros we interviewed, is inefficient planning. But the biggest challenge for most people is just getting started. So begin here with our guide to the best fixes for the most challenging garage-organizing problems. See how the pros deal with one of the messiest spaces in American homes.



FLOOR IT!
Use modular rubber tiles to designate a work zone.
Shown: Swisstrax; for pricing, go to info@monkeybarstorage.com.

HELP! I'm a DIYer and I want to make room for my own work space.

Try this First, clear a spot that's big enough to fit a work/potting bench or craft table by getting as much off the floor as possible. Deciding what stays and what goes is simple, says Gus Gougas, a Los Angeles-based garage organizer and president of OrganizIt. With a few exceptions, if you haven't touched an item in two years, you don't need it, he says. Then delineate your work zone with sturdy, waterproof foam floor tiles. They help create a permanent place for a hobbyist and they're an easy way to make the garage more inviting, Shine says. And foam flooring is more comfortable than concrete, important if you're going to be spending a lot of time on a project, she says.

Buy this Shine recommends the modular flooring by Swisstrax (pricing varies by location) or interlocking tiles from Costco, such as the EZ-Flex ones (\$99 for a 24-square-foot kit).

HELP! My garage is too dark and I can't find things.

Try this Upgrade your lighting. Amp up the overall wattage in your garage and add task lighting to individual areas, such as your work space. "Lighting makes space more accessible," Shine says, "so the net effect is that things become more organized." It's easy to trip over things in the dark, so it's also a smart way to avoid accidents. Another good idea is to use see-through containers. Barry Izsak, author of "Organize Your Garage in No Time" (Que, 2005), suggests that you

"containerize" things as much as you can.

Buy this Use task lighting under cabinets to illuminate work areas. If there's no socket, you can buy battery-powered LED stick-on lights at Amazon for as little as \$7. For optimum brightness in an overhead fixture, upgrade to a 100-watt-equivalent LED bulb. Sylvania Ultra-LED 100W, for \$20, did great in our tests. And don't cheap out on bins. Garages take a lot of wear and tear, and often they're not heated. Shine suggests spending a little more on sturdier plastic bins because plastic can get brittle in cold weather.



A clamp-on lamp is an easy way to add task lighting.
Shown: Tertil work lamp, \$9, Ikea stores.

ID YOUR STUFF Crank out labels for everything.

Shown: Brother P-Touch Home and Office Labeler, \$20, [amazon.com](#).



HANG IT HIGH Ceiling-mounted shelves save space.

Shown: Hyloft ceiling-storage unit, \$70, [homedepot.com](#).

Maximize storage with hanging bins.

Shown: InterMetro unit, \$152, [containerstore.com](#).



HELP! I'm tired of the hodgepodge of bulk food, tarps, tools, and other garage clutter.

Try this Store like with like. Designate a spot for each category of things; for example, bulk food, recycling, sports equipment, garden gear, and tools. As you map out your zones, also think about point of use. The things you use frequently should be the easiest to access. Items you use together should be within close proximity. Bulky stuff that can't be stored vertically—the lawn mower or snow blower, for instance—belongs in the corners of your garage, where it won't get bumped or knocked over by your cars. And chemicals should be stored in a cabinet under lock and key, especially if you have children or pets, Shine says.

Buy this Taking the time to label the front of doors and closed or opaque containers will make a huge difference. A label maker can make the job go faster. Or laminate card stock and attach labels with double-sided tape.

HELP! I have too much stuff. There's not even enough room for my car.

Try this "Think vertical!" says Barbara Reich, author of "Secrets of an Organized Mom" (Simon & Schuster, 2014). Storage that hangs from the ceiling and walls saves room. The walls are best for things that you use frequently (such as bicycles and garden tools). Ceiling-mounted shelves are better for storing stuff you don't use on a regular basis, say, holiday decorations and lightweight, seasonal sports gear such as rackets.

Buy this Shine says that attaching pegboards to walls is usually cheaper than slat-board systems. "You can also utilize the ceiling by adding shelving or racks," Reich says. Be sure to bolt all shelving to walls securely because you don't want anything crashing down on your car. And make sure that any shelves you hang from the ceiling don't interfere with your garage door, and that there's enough clearance to avoid scraping the roof of your car.

HELP! I buy lots of stuff in bulk but don't have a good storage system for all of it.

Try this Sturdy, adjustable open shelving is the way to go. It can be customized to take on big, bulky, weird-shaped items that often get stored in the garage, Shine says. For easier cleaning, consider rolling racks that can be moved away from walls. And for lightweight, nonperishable stuff, say a year's supply of paper towels, you can use a space-saving overhead shelf.

Buy this Izsak suggests investing in 12-, 16-, or 20-inch-deep epoxy or metal shelving for easy storage and easy access. Then assign each shelf a category—for instance, food, garden, and pool. Cabinets, on the other hand, offer a cleaner, more streamlined look, but they're limiting and can become messy. Use them only when you're storing something that poses a safety risk and needs to be locked away—like lawn chemicals. And avoid resin cabinets, Gougas says. "They're inexpensive but not as durable as wood or metal, so they can't hold as much."

WHERE TO SHOP

In addition to Amazon, Home Depot, Lowe's, and The Container store, here are some other retailers that organizing pros love

COSTCO

BEST FOR shelving.

You'll also find wall storage systems and cabinets.

Shipping Depends on the item.

Returns 90 days.

HARBORFREIGHT.COM

BEST FOR workbenches and tool storage.

Wall-mounted magnetic tool organizers are as little as \$10; sturdy wall hooks, \$5.

Shipping Starts at \$7.

Returns 90 days.

RUBBERMAID.COM

BEST FOR mounted wall organizers.

You'll also find a good selection of sturdy storage bins and specialized organizers for tools and sports gear.

Shipping Starts at \$4.95.

Returns 30 days.

OVERSTOCK.COM

BEST FOR wall slat systems and ceiling storage racks.

Also check out the site's open metal shelving and closed cabinets.

Shipping Free for orders over \$50.

Returns 30 days.

Home news

The hottest new organizers

Organizing pros from across the country vote for their favorite new products at the annual gathering of the National Association of Professional Organizers. We sent a scout to the meeting to find out what made the winners' list for 2015. Here are two of our favorites:

NEET CABLE KEEPER

Price \$12

Why the pros love it Always on the lookout for ways to deal with tangled cords and cables, the pros named this product best in show. The unique design features a long, skinny zippered case that conceals the cable and can be rolled up into a small, tidy packet to tuck into a drawer or your work tote. It comes in 11 fun colors, so you can easily ID cords for different devices.

Where to get it neetproducts.com



WRAP IT GIFT BAG WRAPPING-PAPER STORAGE

Price \$60

Why the pros love it A variety of clear-plastic and mesh pockets organize and protect ribbons, bows, tissue paper, gift bags, and more. And specially designed elastic rings hold rolls of wrapping paper in place. Everything is securely zippered in and can be hung in a closet from a handy built-in hanger.

Where to get it boutique.wrapitgiftbag.com



lab update

Safety alert: Toxic floors

A recent "60 Minutes" report accused retailer Lumber Liquidators of selling laminate flooring that emitted more formaldehyde than California standards permit. The store has suspended selling the flooring pending its own investigation. Formaldehyde is a respiratory irritant, and long-term exposure can cause cancer. But phthalates are another problematic flooring chemical. They're endocrine disrupters, and two types are classified as probable or possible carcinogens. They can be found in vinyl flooring, but if you have it in your house, don't panic. You don't have to rip it out. We tested 17 vinyl flooring products for 13 phthalates of high concern and checked to see whether they could come off the flooring and onto your hands or into the air. Though everything we tested had some phthalates, little made it into the air or onto our wipes. Still, if you have young children at home, our safety experts advise wet mopping the floor often and washing kids' hands after they've been on the floor. And if you're thinking about buying vinyl flooring, you might want to hold off for a bit: Home Depot and Lowe's have announced that the flooring they sell will be phthalate-free by year's end.



Actual paint chip!

Nailing the perfect paint color

You can now match your rooms to your nails, thanks to OPI's partnership with Clark+Kensington paints (sold at Ace Hardware). The OPI Color Palette line of nail polish has 50 fab shades this year, including old faithfuls such as Bubble Bath (pale pink). Of the fun new colors, one of our faves is Do You Take Lei Away?—a neutral with a hint of purple. And it's a great paint! In our tests Clark+Kensington, \$32 per gallon, was among our top-rated interior enamels, even edging out big names like Benjamin Moore.



Better than water?

The truth behind health claims on sports drinks and other trendy thirst quenchers

SIP SMARTER
Sports drinks are definitely not for everyone.

If you're tired of plain old H₂O but know how important it is to stay hydrated, you might want to try one of the many sports drinks and flavored waters crowding supermarket shelves. Their pretty colors and tasty-sounding flavors are tempting. And their claims about nutrients, health benefits, and super-hydrating powers can make it seem like these drinks are better for you than plain water.

But are they? We asked our experts to review 20 beverages, including purified waters, sports drinks, and waters with added vitamins. The verdict: Scan before you sip. Ingredients lists can vary a lot among drinks that might seem very similar, and you might be surprised at what's in this stuff. Some are packed with calories, sodium, and sugars, including high fructose corn syrup. Others have artificial sweeteners and/or artificial colors and preservatives. Check prices, too. In our test, the cost per 1-cup serving ranged from 13 cents to a steep \$2.70.

Turn the page for our take on the drinks, along with a sampling of product comparisons. Also see page 42 for a spa chef's clever—and cost-effective—ideas for making your own yummy, healthy waters.

Purified waters

Should you buy them? That depends. Products in this category, which can be plain or flavored, have been put through a purification process such as reverse osmosis, which forces water through a membrane to remove contaminants. Distillation, another purification method, involves boiling water, then turning the vapor back to liquid. Both processes remove minerals that give water body and flavor, so some companies add minerals like sodium and calcium back in. But some also add flavorings and sweeteners, which you might want to skip.



NESTLÉ PURE LIFE (UNFLAVORED)

Price per serving

20 cents

Calories 0

Sugars 0 grams

Sodium —

VS.

NESTLÉ PURE LIFE SPLASH (LEMON)

Price per serving

13 cents

Calories 0

Sugars 0 grams

Sodium —

The key difference From the front of the label, it looks like these bottled waters are similar, except for the lemon flavor. But one is plain water and the other is lemon with artificial sweeteners and preservatives. So when you buy water, always check the ingredients list for extra stuff you may not want.

Tasters' notes Unflavored Pure Life has a clean flavor, but you can taste the artificial sweetener in the lemon-flavored drink, which is sweet and sour, with a hint of bitterness.

Sports drinks

Should you buy them? Maybe. These were originally developed for hard-core athletes to replenish electrolytes such as sodium and potassium that are lost in sweat, plus carbohydrates that muscles use for fuel. Some research suggests that sports drinks can improve your endurance by about 20 percent during an exercise session that lasts longer than 90 minutes. But unless you're involved in an intense activity like running a marathon or doing a 10-mile hike, you don't need them. The average exerciser needs to replace water, not electrolytes, says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., our chief medical adviser.



POWERADE ZERO (LEMON LIME)

Price per serving

25 cents

Calories 0

Sugars 0 grams

Sodium 100 milligrams

Potassium 23 milligrams

VS.

GATORADE G2 (LEMON-LIME)

Price per serving

28 cents

Calories 20

Sugars 5 grams

Sodium 107 milligrams

Potassium 30 milligrams

The key difference Both have artificial colors and sweeteners (sucralose and acesulfame potassium). But the Gatorade has some sugar, too, and Powerade has preservatives. Still, either one might be worth considering if you want to avoid the 53 calories and 14 grams of sugars per serving in the regular versions of the drinks.

Tasters' notes Both drinks have candylike flavor, and you can taste the artificial sweetener.

Water with vitamins

Should you buy them? Probably not. Sipping water with a dose of vitamins sounds like a smart health move, but you're better off getting your vitamins from food. There's no need to replenish vitamins just because it's hot out or you went for a run. "You don't lose vitamins when you sweat," Lipman says. And if you drink a lot of these, you run the risk of overloading on vitamins, especially if you take a multivitamin and/or eat vitamin-fortified foods, like some cereals. Also read labels—some products have up to 3 teaspoons of sugar per cup!



PROPEL ZERO CALORIES WATER BEVERAGE (LEMON)

Price per serving
40 cents
Calories 0
Sugars 0 grams
Sodium 53 milligrams
Potassium —

VS.



VITAMINWATER ZERO RISE (ORANGE)

Price per serving
48 cents
Calories 0
Sugars 0 grams
Sodium 0 milligrams
Potassium 72 milligrams

The key difference A serving of Vitaminwater Zero Rise has 60 percent of the daily recommended amount of vitamin C, 40 percent of four B vitamins, and 10 percent of vitamins A and E. Propel has 20 percent of vitamin C, 23 percent of three B's, and 10 percent of vitamin E. The nutrients and flavors in both drinks are added; they don't come from fruit juice, though the orange color of the Vitaminwater comes from beta carotene, not dyes. It's sweetened with stevia and the sugar alcohols erythritol and sorbitol. Propel has sucralose and acesulfame potassium.

Tasters' notes Both have candylike fruit flavors and a bitter, artificial-sweetener taste. Rise was a bit more sour than sweet.

NEW FLAVORS TO TRY

The coconut-water craze is still going strong—but the next big beverage trend is plant waters flavored with things like artichoke and cactus. Plant-water makers are marketing their products as low-cal, lower-sugar alternatives to coconut water, which has about 40 to 45 calories and 8 to 11 grams of sugars per cup. The drinks below have 0 to 30 calories and 0 to 8 grams of sugars per cup. Some, such as True Nopal Cactus Water, come with pretty bold claims, like "reduces inflammation." The maker of Arty Artichoke Water says artichokes "increase metabolism" and "purify toxins." But if you want to try them, ignore the claims and just consider them a low-cal way to stay hydrated.



ARTY ARTICHOKE WATER, LEMON AND SPEARMINT

Price per serving \$2.70
Tasters' notes Clean, with citrus and minty notes and a slight astringency—a little bit like tea. It's sweetened with agave and monk fruit.



HAPPY TREE ORGANIC RAW MAPLE WATER

Price per serving \$2
Tasters' notes This drink contains the maple tree's thin, watery sap, which, when boiled and concentrated, becomes maple syrup. It doesn't have any maple flavor—it's just a little sweet.



INGO CUCUMBER WATER WATERMELON FLAVOR

Price per serving \$1
Tasters' notes This no-cal drink has hints of cucumber, citrus, and melon; the flavor is mild and fresh. And it has no sweeteners or preservatives.



TRUE NOPAL CACTUS WATER

Price per serving \$1.42
Tasters' notes With 20 percent prickly pear cactus juice, this has a watered-down but decent berry-juice flavor and a slight sweet and sour taste. It has no added sugars.

What to drink instead

DIY flavored waters are a healthy and tasty alternative to bottled drinks. Executive chef Chad Luethje, who works at Red Mountain Resort in southwest Utah, where summer temperatures reach 110° F, has developed recipes that make staying hydrated super-tasty. “Infused waters are so easy to make that the idea of buying a so-called fruit water seems weird to me,” he says. Here are three of his favorite combos:

GINGER-PEACH COOLER

Fill a pitcher with ice and add two quartered peaches (or other stone fruit) and about 2 inches of peeled ginger root, thinly sliced. Fill with water and stir gently. Add fresh lemon verbena leaves or lemongrass stalks, if desired.

VIRGIN JULEP

Steep eight mint tea bags in 4 cups of boiling water. Stir in 1 tablespoon of honey. Let sit for a few hours, add lemon slices and fresh mint springs to taste, and refrigerate. Drink it straight or add water if it seems too strong.

WATERMELON CRUSH Fill a large pitcher with ice and add 1½ cups seedless watermelon cubes; ½ cup sliced strawberries; ½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and sliced into thin rounds; four fresh mint sprigs; one sprig of fresh cilantro; and a few thinly sliced lime rounds. Fill with water and stir gently. Let sit 30 minutes and serve; the flavors may turn bitter if it sits longer than a few hours.

IN SEASON

5 surprising things about ... Eggplant

SMALLER IS TASTIER.

Usually the bigger the eggplant, the more seeds, which can make it bitter. So look for smaller eggplants, and while you're at it, do the dimple test for freshness: Poke the flesh with your finger. If a dent remains, it's over the hill.

THERE'S NICOTINE IN IT.

That's right—just like its cousin, tobacco. But don't worry, you would have to eat more than 20 pounds of eggplant to get the nicotine hit of a cigarette.

PURPLE ISN'T THE ONLY COLOR THEY COME IN.

You can find green, white, orange, yellow, and striped ones.

NUTRITION LOWDOWN

½ cup raw eggplant =

- 10 calories
- 0 grams fat
- 1 gram fiber
- 94 milligrams potassium

IT'S A BERRY.

Botanically speaking, it's a berry. Like other fruits, it develops from the ovary of a plant flower. Vegetables are parts of the plant itself, such as roots, leaves, and stems.

It can be a diet buster.

One study found that when fried in olive oil, its spongy texture soaked up more than 3 tablespoons of oil, or 446 calories. To keep it low-cal, grill, roast, or microwave eggplant with a spritz of oil. If you must fry it, coating slices in flour or bread crumbs can cut oil absorption.

That's deli food?

Turn coleslaw and other supermarket buys into healthy meals

On busy weeknights, you might be tempted to pick up pricey takeout on your way home from work. But you might want to head to the deli counter of your nearest supermarket instead. Those cheap, ready-made dishes can be turned into delicious healthy meals fast. Whole rotisserie chickens are one of the best meal deals. We found them for as

little as \$4.99 at many grocery stores, including Costco, Price Chopper, ShopRite, and Walmart. That's less than what you'd pay for an uncooked bird! Sides like slaw and potato salad can also be good deals (we paid less than \$3.50 per pound). And it's easy to doctor up those foods with your own add-ons. Or try these three quick recipes developed by the foodies in our test kitchen.



MEX IT UP Turn rotisserie chicken into a taco feast.



Chicken and guacamole tacos

Serves 6 (two tacos each) ■ 370 calories, 17 grams of fat per serving

- 2 ripe avocados, pitted**
- 1 lime, juiced (about 2 tablespoons)**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon each, salt and pepper**
- 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon chili powder**
- 1 cup jarred salsa (medium heat)**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water**
- 1 rotisserie chicken, meat removed (about 4 cups)**
- 12 6-inch corn tortillas, warmed**
- 2 cups white cabbage, shredded**
- 1 tomato, chopped (about 1 cup)**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cilantro leaves**

- 1.** In a small bowl, mash the avocados with lime juice, salt, and pepper.
- 2.** In a large skillet over medium heat, add oil and chili powder. Cook about 30 seconds, then add salsa, water, and chicken. Heat until warmed, about 10 minutes.
- 3.** Spread warm tortillas with the avocado mixture, then top with the chicken, cabbage, tomato, and cilantro.

PHOTOS: JAMES WORRELL; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL; PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH



Coleslaw with pears, walnuts, and cranberries

Serves 8 ■ 230 calories,
14 grams of fat per serving

- 4 cups deli coleslaw**
(made with mayo)
- 2 pears**, cored and chopped
- ½ cup** chopped walnuts, toasted
- 1 red bell pepper**, chopped
- ½ cup** dried cranberries
- 1 teaspoon** lemon zest
(optional)

In a large bowl, gently mix all of the ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to serve.



SUPER SIDES

It's easy to dress up slaw and potato salad.



Potato salad with dill and veggies

Serves 8 ■ 170 calories,
9 grams of fat per serving

- 4 cups deli potato salad**
- 3 tablespoons** Country Dijon mustard
- 2 scallions**, chopped
- 1 cup** chopped celery
- ½ cup** chopped fresh dill
- 1 teaspoon** Tabasco sauce (optional)

In a large bowl, gently mix all of the ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Food news

Watch out for 'crunchy' food claims

It's no coincidence that more food labels are featuring crispy-crunchy claims. There are Crispy M&Ms, Herr's Extra Crunchy Kettle Chips, and Ore-Ida Extra Crispy Tater Tots, to name a few. The reason is that crunch sells—and crunchy claims on food have almost doubled in recent years. A study in the journal *Food Science & Nutrition* revealed that one in three consumers preferred crunchy foods to those they had to chew, suck, or "smoosh."

But watch out! "We're hardwired to prefer crispy, crunchy foods because they seem fresher," says Charles Spence, Ph.D., a professor of experimental psychology at Oxford University who has studied the science of crunch. "But it's easy to overeat these foods, which can be a problem if they're high in fat and calories." Researchers working with the University of South Florida seem to bear that out. When volunteers were primed to think about how many calories there were in free brownie samples, consumption of crunchy ones was about 40 percent greater than of soft ones.

As food scientists investigate new ways to make everything from crackers to chewing gum more "crinchy" (an industry term that combines "crunchy" and "crispy"), here are some healthier munchies to look for when you shop:



■ Choose the crispiest, crunchiest fruits and veggies.

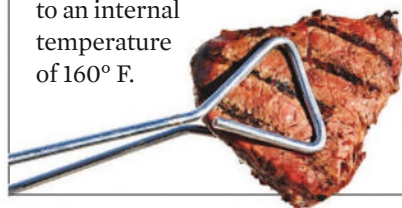
In a review by the Department of Agriculture, carrots, dill pickles, and green peppers came out ahead of tortilla chips on a 100-point scale of crunchiness. The crunchiest fruit: Granny Smith apples. For a satisfying munch, just add hummus or another healthy dip, says Sara Haas, nutritionist, chef, and author of the blog *The Cookin' RD*.

■ Go for nutrient-packed nuts or try veggie chips.

Compared with classic potato chips, some veggie and bean chips have a slight nutritional edge. About one-third in our recent tests were lower in calories, fat, and/or sodium, or higher in fiber. Good choices include Calbee Snapea Crisps, Beanitos White Bean with Sea Salt Chips, and Beanitos Original Black Bean with Sea Salt Chips.

Why you should flip twice

When it comes to grilling steak, there are two schools of thought. There's the single-flip method, which creates those pretty grill marks and a crusty sear, and the multiflip method, which our experts say is the safer way to go. Turning at least twice helps ensure an even distribution of heat needed to kill a potentially deadly form of food-poisoning bacteria in steak and other cuts of meat that have been mechanically tenderized. That's a process in which a machine punctures the meat with blades or needles to break down the muscle fibers. Until new labeling requirements go into effect next year, there's no way to tell whether the meat you buy has been mechanically tenderized. Here's more cooking advice: Multiflip burgers, too, and cook mechanically tenderized meat and ground beef to an internal temperature of 160° F.



There's a safer way to cook that steak!

should you eat that?!



Fiber One Soft-Baked Chocolate Chunk Cookies, \$3.29

WHAT'S IN IT This is no ordinary chocolate chip cookie. You'd have to eat a cup of cooked collard or turnip greens to get the 5 grams of fiber packed into this snack. But don't get too excited; they're made with synthetic fiber—soluble corn fiber, chicory-root extract,

and sugarcane fiber—which lacks many of the nutritional benefits of naturally fiber-rich fruits and veggies. And the long ingredients list includes three forms of sugar as well as palm oil, a source of saturated fat. Compared with Chips Ahoy and Pepperidge Farm cookies,

Fiber One has 20 fewer calories per serving and a little less fat, but it also has the most sodium. **SHOPSMART SAYS** They're not supernutritious or delicious, our testers say. And they cost more than cookie stalwarts Chips Ahoy and Pepperidge Farm.

Eat-healthy help

Make over your shopping cart with new supermarket nutrition services

If you've noticed more of a focus on healthy eating at your local supermarkets lately, odds are it's probably because they've hired staff nutritionists. Most grocery chains now employ one or more nutrition pros, usually a registered dietitian nutritionist, or RDN. (The RDN credentials ensure that the person giving food and nutrition advice has met educational and training requirements established by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.) Their influence can be seen in expanded produce

A LITTLE PUSH Some grocery stores have services that can help you make better choices in every aisle.



aisles, which are often loaded with organic and local fruits and veggies, and nutritious ready-to-eat prepared foods. You might even see one-on-one consultations offered in some stores.

Because the average American visits the doctor fewer than four times per year but shops for groceries once or twice each week, according to the Food Marketing Institute, supermarkets are seeing your health as a business opportunity. "It's the perfect solution to a complicated problem," says Sara Baer-Sinnott, president of Oldways, a nonprofit nutrition-education organization. "People are busy, and they're confused about healthy foods. And dietitians

are hungry for new, practical opportunities to apply their skills.”

The payoff for supermarkets can be huge. Paul Sandberg, co-founder and CEO of PHRQL, a software development company that works closely with stores offering in-store nutrition counseling, says that consumers who use supermarket nutrition services make more trips to the store and often buy more healthy and higher-profit products, such as fruits, veggies, and seafood.

To help you make the most of the nutrition services in your local store, we asked a registered dietitian nutritionist who has experience working with supermarkets, Barbara

Ruhs, RDN, to review offerings at some of the country’s biggest chains. We figured a logical place to start was with our list of the best supermarkets according to our latest survey of 62,917 grocery shoppers. Survey respondents rated their local markets on service, cleanliness, selection of produce, prepared foods, and more.

Among the top 25 supermarkets, 13 have RDNs on staff at the corporate, regional, or store level (see the list below). Seven of those also offer in-store nutrition services to customers, such as weight-loss programs, store tours, product recommendations for people with special dietary needs, healthy

cooking classes, and product samples. Some even have in-store nutrition pros who can give you one-on-one dietary counseling, just like you’d get if you made an appointment with an RDN. A supermarket dietitian-nutritionist can help you develop a healthy eating plan tailored to your needs and interests, such as weight loss, high blood pressure, diabetes, food allergies, or high cholesterol. (Make sure you also check with your doctor.)

Best of all, most of those services are free. To find out what’s going on in your local stores, check the supermarket’s website or ask the manager.

How stores stack up

These are the top 25 supermarkets rated by shoppers in our latest national survey. The stores that have staff RDNs are shown in orange; those offering in-store nutrition services are noted with an asterisk. A few, including Hy-Vee, offer one-on-one consultations, as do some regional stores; be sure to ask at your local market.

1. WEGMANS
2. PUBLIX*
3. TRADER JOE’S
4. FAREWAY STORES
5. MARKET BASKET (NORTHEAST)
6. COSTCO
7. RALEY’S

8. SPROUTS FARMERS MARKET
9. THE FRESH MARKET
10. STATER BROS.
11. WINCO
12. HY-VEE*
13. H-E-B*
14. ALDI

15. WHOLE FOODS MARKET*
16. FRY’S
17. HARRIS TEETER
18. KING SOOPERS*
19. FRED MEYER
20. FOOD CITY (K-V-A-T)

21. HANNAFORD*
22. MEIJER
23. DILLONS
24. SMITH’S FOOD & DRUG
25. LOWES FOODS*

Our pro looked at the nutritionist services of each retailer, factoring in whether or not it offered the following:

- Qualified nutrition experts (RDNs) on staff.
- Dietitian services in-store, such as tours, events, classes, and individual counseling.
- Nutrition tools or resources to make it easier to shop for healthier items, such as in-store shelf tags and publications, as well as online videos, healthy shopping lists, and more.

Check out what some of the chains offer, on the next three pages. The services are free, except where a price is noted.



LOOK CLOSELY In some stores, special tags make the good stuff easy to spot.

Where to find helpful nutrition services

Wegmans

Although this supermarket star has RDNs on staff, none are available directly to shoppers in stores (in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). But they have created tools to guide shoppers and make it easy to shop healthy. Their four “eat well, live well” principles: 1. Strive for 5 cups of fruits and vegetables per day, 2. Get moving, 3. Calories count, and 4. Measure your progress.

Check this out

- Wegmans’ “Wellness Keys” in stores indicate products that are gluten-free, vegan, lactose-free, high fiber, or sugar-free, for example (covering 14 health attributes in all). You can find those same product listings online, along with recipes.
- “Food You Feel Good About” items are private-label options that make it easy to find “clean” products that are free of artificial colors, flavors, preservatives, high-fructose corn syrup, and trans fats; and fresh meats from animals not given antibiotics, hormones, or animal byproducts. Because they are store brands, they are also well-priced.



Based in Iowa, this chain has two RDNs on staff. You can meet and e-mail them at fareway.com, where you’ll also find articles about healthy eating (14 inspiring things to do with blueberries, anyone?), recipes, a link to the store’s magazine, and more.

Check this out

- CentsAble Health, a nutrition magazine published every three months, is available in stores and online.
- One-minute videos feature dietitians preparing healthy recipes.
- Store tours, community nutrition presentations, and school visits from dietitians are available year-round.

Publix

Publix, with stores in the Southeast, offers a decent array of tools to help shoppers in stores and online (under Pharmacy & Wellness). For example, check out the graphic for how to read a nutrition label, with an easy-to-follow breakdown of what each part of the label means and what to aim for if you want to eat healthy. Online you can meet the dietitians and e-mail a question you’d like answered. And some Florida stores are starting to offer in-store consultations.

Check this out

- Green “Better Choice” shelf tags indicate products that are lower in sodium or sugar, or are gluten-free, for example.
- Brown shelf tags signal products that are organic or are made without artificial preservatives, flavors, or colors, or that make a substantiated environmental product claim such as nonchlorine bleach.



Of all the supermarkets in the country, Midwest chain Hy-Vee is the real standout for its nutrition services. You can find an RDN in almost every one of its 235 stores. They’re available to provide in-store nutrition counseling, shopping tours, health screenings, cooking classes, kids’ programs, weight-loss support, and more.

Check this out

- The free HealthyBites newsletter has tips, recipes, shopping lists, and new good-for-you foods recommended by dietitians.
 - Ten-week health programs such as Begin and the Live Healthy America Challenge offer customized help and support to help you eat better, lose weight, get fit, or whatever your goals are.
 - “NuVal” tags in stores score products on a nutritional scale from 1 (put it back!) to 100 (perfect!).
- Price** Most resources are free, but you’ll pay for some personalized services such as nutrition counseling; prices vary and may be covered by insurance.



This family-owned chain operates more than 340 stores in Texas and has seven dietitians located throughout the state. You can sign up online for group classes, shopping tours, cooking demos, a one-on-one consultation with a dietitian, and more. Go to Pharmacy & Health, then click on Registered Dietitian Consultation for the menu of nutritional offerings.

Check this out

■ The website's Eat Well section, under Pharmacy & Health, has lots of healthy eating and cooking tips. See the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid, learn how much water you should drink, and get tips on how to make healthy eating more affordable. (For example, for \$20—the price of an eight-piece KFC meal—you could buy a long list of healthy foods.)

■ The Slim Down Showdown is an annual 14-week healthy-living contest with recipes, workouts, health screenings, videos, and a mobile weight tracker that kicks off in January each year.

Price Classes start at \$20. A session with a dietitian starts at \$85 for the initial consultation and \$65 for follow-ups.



Whole Foods Market stocks plenty of healthy fare, but it's in the middle of the pack for its nutrition services. Although RDNs work in the corporate office and you may be able to find one in some stores, Whole Foods offers healthy eating specialists to meet with customers. Its "Four Pillars of Healthy Eating" help make shopping easy; they point shoppers toward whole foods, plant foods, healthy fats, and nutrient-dense foods, meaning they are packed with a variety of vitamins and minerals.

Check this out

■ Look for the "Health Starts Here" logo on foods that fulfill the four pillars.

■ Also watch for ANDI scores on foods. ANDI stands for "Aggregate Nutrient Density Index" and rates foods on a scale of 1 to 1,000 based on their nutritional content.

■ Download the Healthy Eating Handbook on *wholefoods.com*; it's full of tips for planning, cooking, and enjoying healthy meals.

■ Food lists for people who follow special diets, including gluten-free, vegan, lactose-free, and more. You can go online and customize the lists according to what your local store carries.



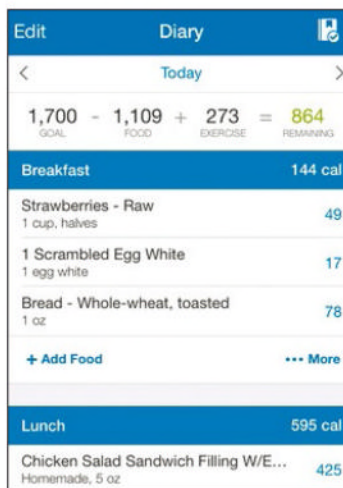
This Northeast chain (with stores in Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont) employs 36 dietitians that are available in 61 store locations and on *hannaford.com*. Click on the Healthy Eating tab to see what's available, such as free healthy eating tips, cooking demos led by RDNs, video shopping tutorials, and a place to send questions to be answered by Hannaford's online dietitian.

Check this out

■ The Guiding Stars system helps you find foods that have the most nutritional bang for the calories because they're packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and whole grains—and don't contain loads of saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium, and sugars. Tip: Shop the stars, sorting online for foods that have one, two, or three stars.

■ Under Recipes, choose Simply Healthy, Special Diets, or Vegan and Vegetarian to find simple and delicious recipes that will help you meet your nutritional goals.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A ONE-ON-ONE



My Fitness Pal and other apps can help you track what you eat.

A nutrition pro can create a customized eating plan to help you shop smarter for healthy foods, lose weight, and make sense of trends such as gluten-free, and help you and your doctor manage a condition such as diabetes. And in case you're wondering, yes, you can expect the same experience in a store as you would with a dietitian you book through your doctor's office. To make the most of your consultation, here are some things to do before you go:

FIND OUT WHETHER THERE'S A FEE.

Many of the nutrition services offered at supermarkets are free. If there is a fee, check with your health plan to see whether nutrition counseling is covered and whether you need a referral or have a co-pay.

KEEP A FOOD DIARY. Write down everything you eat and drink for at least a few days, or use an app such

as MyFitnessPal (shown at left). Be sure to include details, such as how much sugar you put in your coffee and when you consumed each item.

THINK ABOUT YOUR HEALTH. Do you have any conditions the dietitian should take into account? For example, do you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure? Do you take medications? Do you have a family history of diabetes or heart disease?

BE REALISTIC. You want to make sure you get tips for preparing meals that suit the way you live. Do you skip breakfast? Snack late at night? Do you lack kitchen skills and want easy-prepare or ready-to-eat solutions?

HAVE A FEW REQUESTS IN MIND.

Think of things you'd like to learn, such as easy vegan recipes, fast breakfast ideas, tips for getting more protein into your diet, or ways to cut down on stress eating and other bad habits.

Also check out

TRADER JOE'S

RDNs work behind the scenes at Trader Joe's, so they influence the limited selection of products you can buy there. The website has info for people who are gluten-free, kosher, and vegan.



A Colorado-based part of the Kroger family of groceries, its staff RDNs offer good resources, such as a "Walk & Talk" nutrition info session.

Raley's

Although California-based chain Raley's no longer has an RDN on staff, you can find helpful content on its website via HealthNotes, a third-party source for health, wellness, and nutrition info.



This Arizona-based natural market is growing fast and offers a produce-heavy inventory. Though the chain doesn't have its own staff RDNs, it's worth stopping in to buy healthy foods. But skip its website.



Although the Fresh Market doesn't have staff nutritionists, it was named the 2013 Grocery Headquarters Magazine Natural and Organic Retailer of the Year. And it's attracting health-minded shoppers simply by selling a wide variety of fresh foods and clean-labeled products.



This chain, headquartered in North Carolina, has a helpful YourWellness tab on its website with family nutrition info and a focus on reducing childhood obesity.



Its stores (in Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee) don't have in-house nutritionists, but the company has some on staff. Its website has gluten-free and local foods sections but not much more. On the plus side, like Hy-Vee, it has handy "NuVal" tags that show a health score for products.



It employs regional dietitians but doesn't offer counseling in its stores in five states (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio). Its Healthy Living link gives basic nutrition info on its site.



With a dietitian on staff for more than a decade, Lowes offers plenty of help. The nutrition info online is buried under About Us, but once you get there, you'll find tips, healthy foods lists, and contact info for an RDN.

Other great places for nutrition info

■ ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS (eatright.org)

The association that accredits Registered Dietitian Nutritionist programs shares scientifically based but consumer-friendly nutrition advice.

Don't miss this If you're looking for an RDN, use the "Find an Expert" tool to locate qualified experts in your area.

■ USDA CHOOSE MY PLATE (choosemyplate.gov)

This site from the Department of Agriculture is full of helpful info you can count on. A good place to start is MyPlate, a graphic of a plate designed to help people know how to build a healthy plate filled with fruits, veggies, whole grains, protein, and lowfat dairy.

Don't miss this Click on SuperTracker to get a free diet and exercise log to help you track what you eat and how much you move. You can also get customized meal suggestions, including foods and portion sizes to help you get to your desired goal weight.

■ CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST (cspinet.org)

CSPI is a consumer advocacy organization focused on nutrition, food safety, and other important topics. The site may look clinical, but its info is aimed at consumers. For example, its new report on sugar overload (find it under Nutrition, then Healthy Checkout) examines how checkout counters, even in non-grocery stores such as Bed Bath & Beyond, have become a minefield of unhealthy snacks.

Don't miss this The Nutrition Action Health Letter is a monthly newsletter packed with useful, timely nutrition advice.

■ HARVARD NUTRITION SOURCE (hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource)

Get the latest evidence-based nutrition information with a user-friendly emphasis on what to eat.

Don't miss this Click on What to Eat for specific recommendations, including the easy-to-follow Healthy Eating Plate.

MORE STORES WITH SERVICES

After reviewing dozens of supermarket websites and speaking to representatives across the country, we discovered several other retailers that have RDNs on staff and offer services and nutrition education resources in stores. Those include: Giant, Giant Eagle, Kroger, Martin's, and Stop & Shop.

Check yourself!

Inexpensive home devices can help you take control of your health

If you haven't had your blood pressure checked lately, you might be in trouble and not know it. About one in three adults has high blood pressure, and half of them are women. After menopause, women are even more likely to have it than men. Some things that might raise your blood pressure include being overweight, taking birth-control pills, drinking too much alcohol, or having a family history of the condition.

If you fall into any of those groups, or if your pressure was high during pregnancy, you might want to buy a home monitor so that you can monitor yourself rather than waiting until you go to a doctor or relying on one of those machines in pharmacies. Keeping an eye on your numbers is important because high blood pressure ups your risk of a heart attack, a stroke, and kidney problems.

To test the latest home monitors, our experts asked 32 staffers of different ages and blood pressure ranges to try them out. Volunteers were checked every day for five weeks using a different machine each day. The ones that did best for accuracy, ease of use, and comfort are at right. All but one are traditional arm models; the wrist and wireless ones were usually not as accurate.

We also tested home monitors for measuring blood glucose, important for diabetics. Two of the top-rated models cost the least, both for the meter itself and for the test strips, which can add up if you test often. See our Smart Picks on the facing page.

Best blood pressure monitors

24 TESTED  6 SMART PICKS

RITE AID DELUXE AUTOMATIC BP3AR1-4DRITE

Price \$60

Why we like it Our top monitor not only gives accurate readings, but it's also easy to use, and the large numbers are a snap to read. It detects an irregular heartbeat, and the cuff adjusts to fit a variety of arm sizes. On the downside, it stores the readings for only one user, and it doesn't have an indicator that shows your risk category.



RELION BP200 (WALMART)

Price \$40

Why we like it You can't beat the price for this monitor, which also aced our tests. It has helpful features, including an irregular-heartbeat detector, a risk indicator, and a cuff that fits most arms. And it can track and store blood pressure numbers for more than one user.



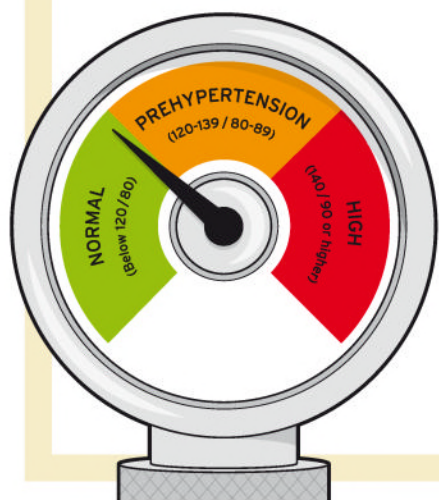
Other Smart Picks

■ iHealth Dock BP3, \$80

■ Omron 10 Series BP786, \$75

■ A&D Medical CRM UA767F, \$70

■ Omron 7 Series BP652, \$70 (wrist)



How do you rate?

Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury, written as mmHg. The systolic (top) number measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats; the diastolic (bottom) measures the pressure between heartbeats. The ranges shown here are for people under age 60 without diabetes or kidney disease; ranges are different for other groups.*

Best blood glucose meters

29 TESTED 10 SMART PICKS

If you have diabetes (about 10 percent of Americans suffer from the disease), you can lower your risk of complications such as cataracts, glaucoma, and kidney disease by keeping track of your blood glucose levels.



UP & UP BLOOD GLUCOSE METER (TARGET)

Price \$15

Why we like it You don't need much blood to get an accurate reading, which is a plus because you're less likely to get errors and waste test strips. This meter can calculate a daily average, so that you can keep track of how you're doing. It's easy to read, with large digits on a big, backlit screen.



RELION MICRO (WALMART)

Price \$15

Why we like it This tiny meter easily slips into a purse or pocket. But you don't give up accuracy for portability. Plus it requires little blood to get a reading. It will calculate your average and flag your results before and after a meal so that you can compare for reference.



The most expensive strips we tested cost \$2,410 per year. But the Up & Up (shown) and ReliOn strips were just \$525 based on taking four readings per day.

Other Smart Picks

- FreeStyle Lite, \$20
- FreeStyle Freedom Lite, \$20
- Bayer Contour Next, \$20
- Well at Walgreens True Metrix, \$22
- Bayer Breeze 2, \$25
- Accu-Chek Aviva Plus, \$30
- Accu-Chek Compact Plus, \$75
- True Results Blood Glucose Monitoring System, \$18

*Our medical experts think that a blood pressure goal of 150/90 for most people ages 60 or older and 140/90 for most people with diabetes or kidney disease is reasonable.

Hot new workouts to try

No more excuses—these moves make it fun to get fit (really!)

Bored with your exercise routine? Or think working out just isn't your thing? That might be because you haven't found something active you enjoy. For proof, just ask someone who danced off the pounds doing Zumba or found new muscles at K-Barre. Fitness pros are always coming up with new ways to get us moving. Here are a handful of the latest fitness crazes worth trying. Hate gyms? See page 56.

OrangeTheory Fitness

Best for Fitbit fans.

What it is People who like to track their stats will like this workout, which uses heart-rate monitors to tell you how hard you're working and to prompt you to take it up a notch or ease up. Switch between five zones doing a variety of activities (treadmill, rowing, and strength moves like burpees and squats) with an intensity that ranges from easy to all-out. And it's a workout that keeps on working even after the hourlong class ends. "Because you're working for at least 12 to 20 minutes in the high-intensity zone," says the founder, Ellen Latham, "you'll continue to burn calories afterward."

Where to try it Studios nationwide (more than 200 at press time, with 150 more planned by the end of 2015). Find one at orangetheoryfitness.com.

Price Varies; for example, \$99 for eight classes per month or \$159 per month for unlimited classes.



ORANGE CRUNCH
Monitors tell you when to go easy or all-out.



STICK WITH IT The bars have rolling steel weights inside to build muscle.

ActivMotion workouts

Best for Building strength, balance, and focus.

What it is Lifting a weighted bar is a challenge in itself, but when the bar is filled with rolling steel weights, your workout goes to a whole new level. "You're not just working against the resistance of the bar," explains Derek Mikulski, who created the class. "You also have to work a lot harder and focus a lot more to keep the weight centered so the steel balls don't move around." University of Michigan researchers who assessed workouts found that the bar produces

up to 170 percent more muscle activation than a static bar without rolling weights. It's a popular tool at core-conditioning classes and boot-camp workouts. "You have to engage in fine movement patterns, which will also improve your balance," Mikulski adds. The workout bars are 4½ to 18 pounds.

Where to try it ActivMotion bars are used in classes nationwide.

Price It depends on the gym. Or you can buy your own bar for \$110 and up, then follow an instructional DVD, for \$20, at activmotionbar.com.

RISE AND SLIDE Moving plates and bands help you get long, lean muscles.



Megaformer classes

Best for Pilates devotees who want a new challenge.

What it is The Reformer, a Pilates equipment standard, gets a makeover as the Megaformer, star of a new breed of class. The Megaformer is designed to increase balance, coordination, endurance, flexibility, strength, and more by working muscles in different ways at the same time. Many celebs have been drawn to the low-impact, high-intensity, super-efficient workout. Sofia Vergara and Michele Obama are said to be fans.

Where to try it Nationwide. Studios in New York (SLT), Washington, D.C. (Solidcore), and Los Angeles (Pilates Plus) have certified instructors. Learn more at lagreefitness.com.

Price Varies; from about \$30 per class to \$375 per month.

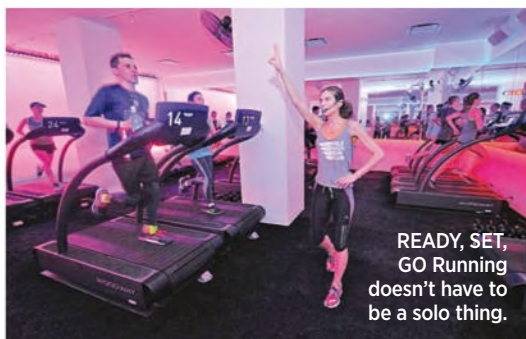
Rowing and running studios

Best for Social animals.

What it is Spinning classes take an individual workout (pedaling a stationary bike) and turn it into a group activity. Now you can join rowing and running classes that keep you moving—and motivated—as you follow an instructor's moves. In treadmill classes like those at the Mile High Run Club in New York City, members go through inclines, runs, and sprints. "You're not forced to keep up with the pack or get left behind," says the founder, Debora Warner. And in rowing classes at places like Ro Fitness in Austin, Texas, you can join others to get a full-body workout that's heavy on the cardio, light on the impact, and ideal for all fitness levels.

Where to try it Nationwide.

Price Varies depending on activity and location. For example, it's \$20 for a single class at Ro Fitness and \$34 for a single class at the Mile High Run Club; rofitness.com and milehighrunclub.com.



READY, SET, GO Running doesn't have to be a solo thing.

Fitwall

Best for Toning your core and rear.

What it is Ramp up your routine—literally—with a 7-foot-tall workout device called the Fitwall. The 40-minute classes give you a full-body workout designed to improve cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and strength, says Clifton Harski, director of training. The wall has several footholds and handholds that allow you to climb your way up. Because you're using the wall like a ladder, you're

working your upper and lower body together. And there are ways to change your positions to increase (or lessen) the difficulty. The workouts burn about 400 to 500 calories, Harski says, and they pay special attention to the back of the body (especially your butt) as well as your core.

Where to try it California, Colorado, and Michigan; another 20 locations coming; fitwall.com.

Price About \$20 per class.



HANG IN THERE! Fitwall classes are a good booty toner.

MovNat

Best for Gym haters.

What it is The idea behind this "functional" fitness offering is to get you fit in a way that helps you in your daily life. MovNat emphasizes "real life" movement such as balancing, climbing, jumping, lifting, running, and walking, according to the program's founder, Erwan Le Corre. "We teach you techniques and mindful movement," he says. So MovNat offers some mind/body benefits, too. You can expect to do anything from crawling along the floor to carrying a classmate on your back to climbing up a rope.

Where to try it MovNat has more than 2,000 certified trainers worldwide; find one at movnat.com.

Price About \$15 per class.



PUSH IT MovNat classes can get you out of the gym and into the fresh air.

FITNESS

Fluid Running

Best for Joggers who want to go easy on their joints.

What it is This program offers deep-water running classes where you jog without pounding the pavement. “Anyone and everyone can do it,” says the founder, Jennifer Conroy, a trainer and Ironman athlete who found that running in water helped her quickly recover from a torn calf muscle. The 30- and 55-minute classes feature moderate- to high-intensity running, with intervals of sprinting, elongated strides, and arm- or leg-only segments.

Where to try it At gyms in California, Colorado, and Illinois, and at YMCAs in Illinois; fluidrunning.com.

Price \$12 and up for classes at gyms; price varies at YMCAs.



WATER WORKS
A pool workout is good for beginners or after an injury.



JUST SHOW UP
No set class times make 9Round workouts good for busy people.

9Round

Best for Tough chicks.

What it is Think Curves with boxing gloves. These co-ed gyms offer a 30-minute circuit workout that kicks your butt and a whole lot more. Nine stations—each requiring 3 minutes—include cardio, weight training, abdominal exercises, and kicks and punches. A boxing bell rings when it's time to switch. Between stations, do sit-ups, push-ups, squats, or hit a punching bag for 30 seconds. The beauty is that there are no set class times; just show up and a trainer will take you through the paces. “It's not a fight gym—it's a fitness gym,” says a co-founder and the chief operating officer, Heather Hudson. In one workout, you can burn about 500 calories, she says.

Where to try it 9Round gyms (more than 235 in 39 states and five countries); 9round.com.

Price \$49 to \$79 per month for unlimited workouts.

NOT A GYM RAT?

You can work up a sweat anywhere, anytime, often free, by watching a video or using an app. A few to try:

BeFIT

Top trainers like Denise Austin, Billy Blanks, and Jillian Michaels take you through dance, boot camp, yoga, strength moves and more via YouTube; youtube.com/user/befit.

Price Free.

DAILY BURN

This popular streaming service, at dailyburn.com, offers hundreds of workouts for all fitness levels and interests, from Pilates to plyometrics. You'll also find diet recommendations and stick-with-it motivational tips.

Price \$12.95 per month.

PELOTON CYCLE

Join in a high-energy indoor cycling class or catch one streaming live from the New York City studio. Although the company would prefer that you buy one of its cycles, the truth is that you can do the class on any indoor bike. **Price** Download the free iTunes app or pay \$39 per month for unlimited live-streaming classes with a \$1,995 bike purchase; pelotoncycle.com.

YOGA TODAY

Get into your downward dog without the crowds. Classes range from beginner-friendly to yogi-only, all recorded in beautiful Jackson Hole, Wyo., and streamed via yogatoday.com. Click on each pose for directions. **Price** \$15 per month or \$119 per year.

Health news

3 SCARY SAFETY WORRIES YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT

THE WORRY **LISTERIA**

Concerns about the bacteria led to recalls of more than 10 foods this year, including Amy's Kitchen frozen meals, Blue Bell ice cream, and Sabra hummus. Contaminated Blue Bell products caused 10 serious cases of food poisoning (three were fatal) in four states; the other recalls weren't linked to any illnesses.

The facts Not everyone who eats listeria-contaminated food gets sick—90 percent or more of illnesses occur in pregnant women, newborns, people older than 65, and those with weak immune systems. And although it accounts for only about 1,600 cases of food poisoning per year (compared with 1 million for salmonella), one-fifth of people who get infected die.

Protect yourself The same food-safety smarts you'd use to fight other bacteria—such as washing your hands before and after you handle food and using separate cutting boards for meat and produce—help ward off listeria, too. But the bacteria are unique in that they can multiply at refrigerator temperatures, so keep your fridge on the cold side—our experts recommend 37° F. Listeria can occur in a number of foods, but it's most commonly associated with soft cheeses such as brie and queso fresco, deli meats, and hot dogs. If you're in a high-risk group, avoid those foods.

THE WORRY **ANTIBIOTICS IN MEAT**

Antibiotics used in animals to make them grow faster or to prevent disease are one factor in the rise of bacteria that have become immune to one or more antibiotics. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can flourish and spread, threatening our ability to treat bacterial infections.

The facts Cooking foods properly kills these bugs, but if you end up getting seriously ill from one of them, your infection may be difficult to treat. These bacteria may also spread from the farm into the environment in a number of other ways and may cause illnesses that aren't food-related.

Protect yourself Use a meat thermometer and cook whole cuts of meat to 145° F, ground meat to 160° F, and poultry to 165° F. Also, buy meat without antibiotics. Labels to look for include “organic” and “raised without antibiotics.”



Calories aren't the only reason to avoid OD'ing on syrup!

THE WORRY **CARAMEL COLOR**

Some types of this brown artificial coloring—found in many soft drinks, pancake syrup, and other foods—contain a potentially cancer-causing chemical called 4-Mel. In 2013, our tests found few widely sold soft drinks with less than 5 micrograms of 4-Mel per 12 ounces, a level our experts consider acceptable.

The facts Our tests this year have shown some improvement—but there's room for more. Malta Goya, which had more than 300 micrograms of 4-Mel per serving in our 2013 tests, had undetectable levels in five of six samples. Pepsi and Diet Pepsi were lower, too, but more variable. Our first analysis found 25 to 182 micrograms of 4-Mel per 12 ounces. This time the range was 3 to 25 micrograms in the 15 samples we tested.

Protect yourself Caramel coloring is found in some pancake syrups, baked goods, and other foods. Even small amounts of 4-Mel can add up; lifetime daily exposure to 29 micrograms carries a risk of one excess cancer case in 100,000. The safest thing to do is read ingredients lists and cut back on products that contain caramel coloring.

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At bookstores nationwide or online at:
www.ConsumerReports.org/books

A new way to buy clothes

These sites do the shopping for you—just try stuff on and keep what you want. We checked out 6 services.

We all get the dressing-room blues. The harsh lighting doesn't help. Then there's the unflattering rear view in the mirror and the peril of trying to find a sales clerk to help you find another size or—dare we say it?—give you advice. One way to avoid the dreaded dressing room is to skip it altogether. A new breed of clothing websites help you do that by choosing clothes for you based on your preferences (you either take a quiz or make selections yourself) and mailing them to you so that you can try them on in the privacy of your own home. Keep what you like, and return what you don't. We asked staffers to try out six of the websites. Turn the page to see what we got.

NONSTOP SHOPPING
Get new clothes sent to you every month or however often you like.

PHOTO: JAMES WORRELL; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPELL; PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH



LE TOTE

How it works Take a longish quiz about things such as your body shape, your weight, and what celebs and brands you like (no sizes except your bra size). Then browse items and put a heart on the ones you like; those go into your virtual closet. Then a stylist chooses three garments and two accessories for you. You can reject anything you don't like, then you get the items in a tote. You can wear what you like, then return it, or buy it and keep it. Mail back your tote containing any items you don't want, then get another one. Includes sizes 2 to 10 and XS to L; members' prices are discounted from regular retail (and are shown at right).

Price \$49/month styling fee; garments cost around \$25 to \$110.

Shipping Free both ways.

Returns Within 30 days of purchase.

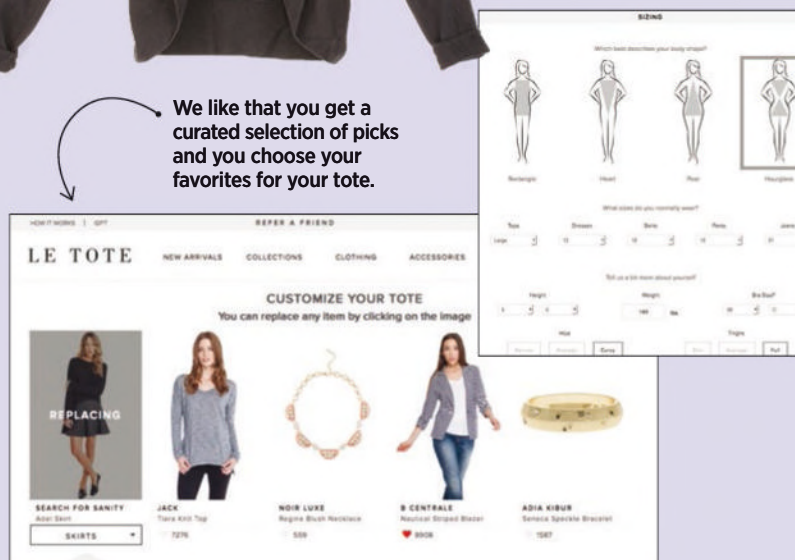
Shopper's notes The styles on the site were modern and trendy, and our shopper liked just about everything she received in two totes. Some things fit, but quite a few didn't (our shopper says she's difficult to fit). The selection included brands she likes, such as Calvin Klein, Free People, and Zara. She says she liked Le Tote enough to sign up and use it herself. But she says she likes the idea of using the service to wear and return stuff rather than as a shopping service (because clothing may have been worn already by others). And if you're quick about it, you might be able to get three or four totes in a month, so you'd have new clothes almost every week.



Our shopper liked this top, but it was too low-cut and the armholes showed her bra.

Shown (clockwise from top left): Lost April Shelby drawstring dress, \$54; Everly Adriana keyhole top, \$27; Noir Luxe Laurel Wreath necklace, \$38; Noir Luxe Siberian city scarf, \$24; T Tahari Ruthie shrug, \$58.

We like that you get a curated selection of picks and you choose your favorites for your tote.



These are the items from our shopper's first box, which was filled with more misses than hits. (The tops were flimsy and had some loose threads—it is called Stitch Fix!)



STITCH FIX

How it works You take a style quiz, answering questions about your sizes and styles you like. You can also start a Pinterest board to share what you like. A personal shopper chooses five items for you, which includes clothes and accessories and comes with a card suggesting different combos. Buy what you like; get 25 percent off if you keep everything. Order whenever you feel like getting some new clothes, or set up regular deliveries, from every few weeks to every few months. Sizes start at 0 and go up to 14.

Price \$20 styling fee per order, deducted from the price of any items you buy. The average price is \$55 per item.

Shipping Free both ways.

Returns You have three days from receipt to try on your items; returns must be postmarked by the third day.

Shopper's notes Our shopper said that the personalized card made her feel like a friend was helping her out in the dressing room. The first "Fix" wasn't her style at all—too many patterns—though everything fit. She sent everything back, requesting no prints next time. The second box was better, but it did contain one item with a print (the red shirt shown at right). The quality was better this time, too; the first box contained clothes with cheap materials, loose threads, and uneven armholes on one shirt. She didn't see any familiar designers or brands among her shipments. Our shopper said that Stitch Fix was fun to try and that it did push her out of her usual style (though she still refuses to wear prints!). She says she would recommend it to her friends, especially anyone who is difficult to fit, doesn't like to shop, or needs help trying new things.

Shown (clockwise from top left): Towne & Reese Alyssa carved enamel drop earrings, \$28; Renee C Tucker split-back blouse, \$38; Margaret M Emer cropped straight-leg pant, \$98; THML Zeldan Hi-Lo blouse, \$44; RD Style Portsmouth knit top, \$48.

Your first step is to take a quiz about your size, shape, and preferred styles.

What rise jeans do you prefer? (Select all that apply)

☐ Low ☒ Mid ☐ High

What style of jeans do you prefer? (Select all that apply)

☐ Skinny ☒ Straight ☒ Bootcut ☐ Wide

How do you prefer clothes to fit the bottom half of your body?

☐ Loose ☒ Tailored ☐ Slim

Are you curvy on your bottom half?

☒ Yes ☐ No

How would you characterize your proportions?

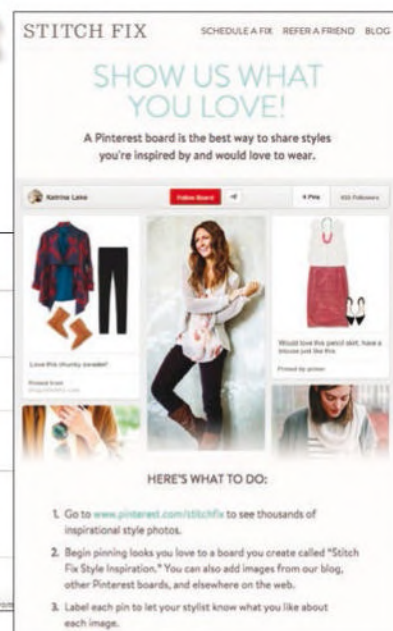
Shoulders ☐ ☒ ☐ Arms ☐ ☒ ☐ Torso ☐ ☒ ☐

Hips ☐ ☒ ☐ Legs ☐ ☒ ☐

Are you interested in receiving petite sized clothing from Stitch Fix?

☐ Yes ☒ No

* Your stylist will send you petite sizes when available and also select from



GWYNNIE BEE

How it works Sign up and choose a plan based on the number of items you'd like to get (from 1 to 10), then browse items and add the ones you like to your virtual closet. The site will send your desired number of items from your closet. Wear what you want, buy what you want to keep, and return everything else. The site fits sizes 10 to 32.

Price You pay a fee, which depends on the plan you choose, from \$35 for three items to \$159 for 10 items. Clothes prices are discounted for members; many items cost less than \$50.

Shipping Free both ways.

Returns No time limit.

Shopper's notes The appeal of the service is that you can borrow clothes for as long as you like, so if you want to constantly refresh your wardrobe, you might like it. But our shopper found that the selection was very limited in her size range (16 to 18), it had too many patterns and prints that weren't her style, and she couldn't find any pants that came in a long length.



Shown (from left): Igigi Olivia black and ivory skirt, \$33; London Times colorblock belted maxi dress, \$34; NYDJ plum scarf print blouse, \$43.

FABLETICS

How it works This service, which has gotten big buzz because its cofounder and model is actress Kate Hudson, is all about the athletic wear. Take a "lifestyle quiz," then shop from recommended outfits, which consist of three pieces, including a mix of tops, bottoms, and cover-ups. You can buy items à la carte or pay for a VIP membership and receive curated outfit choices every month. Make your selections by the fifth of the month or cancel before then to avoid being charged for that month. Includes sizes XXS (0 to 2) to XXL (18 to 20).

Price Free for occasional shoppers; \$49/month for VIP members. Clothes are priced from \$25 to \$115.

Shipping Free for purchases of more than \$50; \$5 for smaller orders.

Returns Within 30 days of shipment; \$6 restocking fee for refunds.

Shopper's notes Our shopper felt like the quiz captured her sporty style, and the suggested clothes were things she'd actually wear. The problem was that most of the stuff she wanted to order was out of stock. That's how we wound up with the mostly black outfit shown at right. Our shopper liked all but the shorts, which kept riding up. Bottom line: Maybe this site is just too popular for its own good!



Shown (from left): Dili short, \$25; Norwalk tank, \$40; Lima capri, \$35.

We tried to order colorful clothes, but lots were sold out in the sizes we needed.



JOCKEY BRA

How it works Order the Fit Kit and figure out your size using a tape measure and a series of various sized plastic cups (like Russian nesting dolls!). Jockey has its own unique sizes, so no more 32B, for example (you'd be a size 02/32 according to its system). The company says its bras fit most women who wear a 32A to 44E. Then take a quiz about the kind of bras you're looking for (such as padded, underwire, and sports) and choose items that suit your style. When your bras arrive, keep the ones you like and return any rejects.

Price \$20 for the Fit Kit. Bras cost \$60, but ours were on sale for \$40 (see below). Get \$20 off your first order.

Shipping Free both ways.

Returns Anytime.

Shopper's notes The Fit Kit was a cinch with its simple plastic cups. (The one that best fits your boob indicates your cup size.) Because it's Jockey we expected the bras to be sporty, or at least no-frills. And they're definitely not as pretty as the ones from True&Co., at right. But if you're a no-frills girl, you might like Jockey's everyday basic styles, in black, white, or nude.



TRUE&CO.

How it works Take a brief quiz to suss out your lingerie style preferences as well as your sizes. Then True & Co. acts as your personal lingerie shopper, suggesting bras, panties, pajamas, and loungewear you might like. You choose your five favorites and the company sends them to you to try on. Buy what you want, and go online to provide feedback, which informs your next bunch of selections. Sizes range from 32A to 38DD for bras, small to large for other items.

Price No membership fee, but if you don't provide online feedback, the site will charge you \$20. Prices start around \$30 and go up to \$154 (most are in the \$30 to \$68 range).

Shipping Free for orders of more than \$75; \$8 otherwise. Returns are free if postmarked within five days of receipt; \$20 fee thereafter; no returns after 30 days.

Shopper's notes The site was beautiful, and so was the merchandise. We stuck to bras, choosing five very different styles (see below). When they arrived, they looked stylish and well-made—but they were too tight in our shopper's usual size. She quickly returned them (that five-day window is tight!) and got the next size up; those fit better. Some of the user reviews included the same complaint, though others said their bras ran big. So our best advice is to order your usual size but pay attention to the return window. Our biggest gripe: Nothing on the site tells you up front that sizes are limited, so taking the quiz was a waste of time for a larger-busted staffer.



Great fall finds at Kohl's

If you don't already shop at Kohl's, now is a great time to check it out. The retailer has loads of trendy transitional looks that you can wear during the summer and fall. Many of the pieces are part of exclusive lines that are collaborations with designer labels such as Juicy Couture, Lauren Conrad, Vera Wang, and Thakoon Panichgul. (Check out some pieces from his upcoming capsule collection, on the facing page.) Pronounced "ta-koon," the star designer's fans include Charlize Theron and Michelle Obama. Also look for basics from Kohl's store brand, Apt. 9. We love this season's menswear-inspired tweeds, '70s-style peasant blouses, and bright reds and maroons. Don't forget to go online for savings passes and coupons.



A crimson top pops against the houndstooth skirt below, and mixing textures adds a little edge.

Shown: Elle red pullover knit, \$50.



On-trend tassels add a touch of fringe without going overboard.

Shown: Jennifer Lopez chain knotted necklace, \$28.

A pencil skirt is a classic but looks more mod in hip-minimizing multiprint checks.

Shown: Elle houndstooth pencil skirt, \$50.



A top-handled bag in luxe-looking faux leather gives a chic touch to any outfit.

Shown: Simply Vera Vera Wang Keton Xbody bag, \$79.

It looks like tweedy fabric, but it's actually weatherproof vinyl.

Shown: Juicy Couture vinyl tote, \$99.



This season's sparkly accents give classic flats a fun update.

Shown: Simply Vera Vera Wang pointed-toe embellished flat, in black, \$60.

SHOPPING INFO YOU SHOULD KNOW

Kohl's has about 1,200 stores in 49 states. Go to kohls.com for locations, sales info, and merchandise. Shipping starts at \$6. The site has a super-generous return policy, with no time limits.



Dark floral prints are an edgy new look.

Shown: Simply Vera Vera Wang Lovely shirt dress, \$68.



Pretty details make this classic blouse look more refined.

Shown: LC Lauren Conrad lace bib blouse, \$44.

sneak peek!



A fringed bag is a great way to add the trendy trim to your wardrobe.

Shown: Sonoma life + style faux suede messenger bag, \$60.



Peasant blouses and A-line skirts are back. This outfit, including the scarf, is part of a collection by this season's guest designer Thakoon—in stores on Sept. 10.

Shown: Thakoon Crown Print blouse, \$54, and Thakoon A-line wrap mini skirt, \$50.



Like a sweater, this scarf zips and even has pockets.

Shown: Thakoon for DesignNation zip scarf, \$48.



The low boot remains a wardrobe staple this season.

Shown: Apt. 9 bootie in cognac, \$75.

SHOPSMART SHOPS WITH ... 5 TOP DERMATOLOGISTS

What skin doctors buy

You've heard your dermatologist's advice, and maybe she has even given you some product recommendations. But what if you could take a peek inside your doctor's makeup bag to see which beauty products she actually uses? What do skin pros buy for their skin? Well, we got some top docs to open up and share their beauty secrets and the products they love.



Dendy Engelman, M.D.
Dermatologist
and
Dermatologic
Surgeon,
Manhattan
Dermatology
and Cosmetic
Surgery



Wild Rose Body Oil by Weleda, \$18

"I love oils, even in the warmer months. They penetrate deeply and hydrate beautifully without leaving a greasy feel. I apply this oil in the shower before drying off to lock in moisture."



CE Ferulic by SkinCeuticals, \$102

"I use it every morning to give my skin extra protection against the strong summer sun. Just five drops in the morning help to boost UV protection, in addition to my daily SPF lotion."



Dermablend's Quick-fix Concealer, \$18

"I have terrible seasonal allergies and get pretty significant undereye circles as a result. This Dermablend product is great for camouflaging them. In addition to excellent coverage, the formula is extremely blendable and is water- and sweat-proof for up to 16 hours, which is a huge plus during warmer months."



Jill Waibel, M.D.
Medical Director/
Owner of Miami
Dermatology
and Laser
Institute
in Miami

Bio-Oil, \$9

“After showering I leave a few beads of water on my skin and then slather on this oil. The oil and beads of water absorb quickly and don’t leave skin greasy, like most oils, and keep skin hydrated.”



Cetaphil facial wash, \$7

“This is one product I use for myself and my kids. It is gentle, fragrance-free, and can be used for all skin types. When I first went to school, teachers shared that it was the best product to use, and I always recommend to my patients as well.”



Marina Peredo, M.D.
Dermatologist,
Skinfluence NYC



Kérastase Soleil Masque UV Defense Active, \$32

“It’s great for the summer because it helps repair and treat sun-exposed hair. I love it because even after sun exposure, my hair becomes shinier and softer after using the mask. It’s also important for women to remember to put SPF on their hair parts during the summer. I like to use a spray SPF for that, such as **GOLDFADEN MD’s Sun Visor, \$50**. It’s lightweight, so it doesn’t weigh down the hair.”



SkinMedica’s TNS LipPlump, \$58

“This product is always in my bag—it plumps, conditions, and has great shine.”



Susan DeCoste, M.D.
Dermatologist,
South Coast
Dermatology,
in Boston



RoC Retinol Correxion Max Wrinkle Resurfacing System, \$30

"Everyone can benefit from a Retinol cream at night. I like this one."

Avène RétrinAL 0.1 Cream, \$39

"For something with more strength that you can get from a dermatologist, I use Avène RétrinAL. I have been using and recommending this to my patients for nearly a decade."



Trevor Cates, M.D.
Naturopathic
Physician from
Park City, Utah

Weleda Wild Rose Deodorant, \$11

"I am super-picky when it comes to skin care products. The most commonly used products are full of chemicals and don't do what they claim to do. Many of the chemicals have been shown to have endocrine-disrupting effects, so they can create imbalances in hormones. Now that I'm in my 40s, the last thing I want to do is throw my hormones out of whack! We deserve natural/clean products that work! I've had friends ask why I smell like roses and I admit, it's my underarms! Yes, my deodorant smells like roses! I first picked up Weleda products when I had babies with diaper rashes and fell in love with their diaper creams. Then I discovered this deodorant. It smells nice, and it works."



Jane Iredale PureLash Mascara in Black Onyx, \$20

"I rarely leave home without it. I'm supersensitive to most mascara, but I love this one! It does not contain lacquers, shellac, or petroleum-based ingredients. I am fair and have blond eyelashes naturally, but with this on my lashes look thick and long without being flakey and caked on. I've even had a makeup artist ask if I have fake lashes since they look so long! I also like **DeVita Natural Skin Care and Color Cosmetics Absolute SoftLines Eyeliner Pencil, \$15**. It contains natural pigments and it goes on smoothly. I can depend on it to last throughout long days. It can be used for brows, too."



Your best computer

Name your price, and we'll show you the perfect model


Even a \$250 computer can do a great job at stuff like word processing, sending e-mails, and shopping online. Spend more and you can find superfast and portable computers that you can slip into a big purse. Lenovo's new LaVie Z laptop weighs just 1.9 pounds, which is what many soup cans weigh. Looking for thin? Apple's latest 12-inch MacBook is just more than 1/2-inch at its thickest. And a bunch of new computers are shape-shifters, doubling as laptops and tablets.

Turn the page for the best models in every price range. We'll tell you how to get the most for your money as well as the trade-offs you'll

face when spending less.

Now's a great time to go shopping. This is the time of year when manufacturers drop prices on older models to make way for the latest back-to-school computers. Most of the hot new PCs will come with Microsoft's Windows 10 operating system, but if you want to save money and you're willing to buy a Windows 8 machine, you may be able to find some great deals.

And that's not a bad idea because Microsoft will offer free OS upgrades for most users throughout the next year. Just make sure your new machine also has the display quality, battery life, and other features you want.



BAG IT! The MacBook Air is slim and light enough to slip into a purse.

Best computers | 146 TESTED 16 SMART PICKS

\$250 to \$375

BEST FOR Word processing, e-mailing, and Web browsing.

WHAT TO EXPECT A laptop made of plastic, very few extras, a low-cost processor, shorter battery life, and heavier weight. Forget about playing demanding games or editing videos with a computer in this price range.

ACER ASPIRE E51-512-P9GT

Price \$250

Battery life 6¼ hours

Weight 4.9 pounds

Why we like it It may not be the fastest laptop, but this 15-inch Acer is a good choice if you're on a budget and don't demand a lot from your computer. You won't notice the slower performance if you stick to word processing, e-mailing, and the like. You get a decent amount of battery life for a laptop in this price range. The speakers are good enough for watching a movie (though for the best sound you'll want to add an external set). And it comes with a DVD drive, increasingly rare in laptops.

Bummer The display's viewing angle is mediocre, so you'll have to make adjustments when sharing the screen.

**bargain
buy**



DELL CHROMEBOOK 11

Price \$250

Battery life 14 hours

Weight 2.8 pounds

Why we like it Chromebooks use Google's Chrome operating system, which works with online applications such as Google Docs. You don't need a lot of storage space because your apps and files are stored mostly online, although you can work offline when there's no Wi-Fi. Most Chromebooks aren't blazing performers, but this one did quite well in our tests, so you'll be able to play online games and stream video even while you're multitasking. Because Chromebooks are largely geared toward kids and schools, Dell toughened this model up with a rubberized LCD and base trim for shock protection, Corning Gorilla Glass for enhanced scratch resistance, and a fully sealed keyboard and touchpad for spill resistance (we did not test those features).

Bummer You can't use your familiar Mac or Windows applications.



Other Smart Picks

- **HP TouchSmart 15-g059wm (15-inch laptop), \$375**
- **Toshiba Satellite CL15-B1300 (11-inch laptop), \$250**



\$500 to \$650

BEST FOR Word processing and other productivity tasks, as well as streaming videos, some video editing, and basic gaming. This is the sweet spot for most users.

WHAT TO EXPECT A variety of laptop sizes, a battery that lasts at least a full workday, speakers that don't make you cringe, and more memory (up to 8 gigabytes). But you might not get the most up-to-date processor, and it won't be as thin and light as more expensive models.

turns
into a
tablet



DELL VENUE 11 PRO 5000

Price \$500

Battery life 9¾ hours

Weight 1.7 pounds

Why we like it Detach the keyboard from this 11-inch laptop's display and you have a Windows tablet that did well in our tests. It has plenty of battery life. Colors on the touch-screen display are accurate and natural-looking, and the viewing angle is wide. Even though the keyboard is not full-sized, it's well-designed and comfortable to use. Its 64GB solid-state drive provides fast wake-up and file access. That's plenty of storage for a tablet (though you might want to add an external drive for extra storage for your files).

Bummers It's a bit heavy for a tablet, it has only 2GB of memory, and the solid-state drive is smaller than a hard drive.

LENOVO Z40

Price \$550

Battery life 8½ hours

Weight 4.7 pounds

Why we like it Its Core i5 processor gives the Lenovo Z40 enough oomph for speedy video editing and mainstream game playing. It's lightweight and very portable, considering its size. It also has a 500GB hard drive, providing a decent amount of storage. It comes with Lenovo's face-recognition software for secure log-in and voice control for when you're tired of typing.

Bummers The display's viewing angle could be wider, and colors aren't completely accurate.



Other Smart Picks

- **Lenovo ThinkPad L540** (15-inch laptop), \$650
- **Toshiba Satellite E45T-B4106** (14-inch laptop), \$650



\$700 to \$1,000

BEST FOR Portability and performance.

WHAT TO EXPECT A very long battery life, very light weight, the ability to do just about anything typical of home and business use. But you won't get enough power for professional graphics or high-end video editing.



APPLE MACBOOK AIR 13-INCH MJVE2LL/A

Price \$1,000

Battery life 18¼ hours

Weight 3 pounds

Why we like it The MacBook Air has been a standard-setter for ultralight laptops for years, and it continues to do a great job as a leader in that category. The latest version has a super-long battery life, and unlike the newer

(and even lighter) MacBook, it has a memory-card slot, a Thunderbolt port (for fast transfer of files to an external drive, for example), and two USB ports.

Bummer Performance is very good but essentially on par with Windows laptops that cost hundreds less, in the \$500-to-\$650 price range.



HP SPECTRE X360-13T

Price \$900

Battery life 16 hours

Weight 3.3 pounds

Why we like it The Spectre is a 13-inch convertible laptop that folds into various positions, including a tent, stand, and tablet. It's a bit heavier than you'd ideally want a tablet to be, but that's a problem with most convertibles. As a laptop, though, it's relatively light. With excellent performance, it's a speedy productivity machine, but it can also accomplish tougher tasks such as video editing and midrange gaming at full tilt.

Bummer Its 128GB solid-state drive is relatively small.

Other Smart Picks

- **Lenovo Yoga 3** (11-inch convertible), \$700
- **Toshiba Satellite S55-B5157** (15-inch laptop), \$750



\$1,000-plus

BEST FOR Gaming enthusiasts, entertainment, and graphics pros.

WHAT TO EXPECT Vivid, high-resolution displays; the latest, speediest processors; better-than-average speakers; and aluminum laptop chassis. But for a more souped-up gaming system, you'll need to try a specialty manufacturer.



APPLE IMAC WITH RETINA 5K DISPLAY MF886LL/A

Price \$2,300

Why we like it This all-in-one iMac desktop is a workhorse that also makes a great entertainment system. The beautiful 27-inch display has a resolution higher than what you'd find on an Ultra HD TV. Sound was very good, and it can run demanding games. It has a 128GB solid-state drive for speed and a generous 1-terabyte hard drive.

Bummer The iMac without the high-res display costs less and is equally powerful.



SAMSUNG ATIV BOOK 9 NP940X5J-K01US

Price \$1,500

Battery life 12 hours

Weight 4.4 pounds

Why we like it The thin, light model topped our ratings of 15-inch computers. Its Core i5 processor and 8GB of memory will get you through your work fast, and it can handle game-playing and other entertainment. The aluminum chassis keeps it light, and you can charge devices while it's in sleep mode.

Bummer The solid-state drive is small.

best
15-
inch

Other Smart Picks

■ **Dell XPS 27 Touch** (all-in-one desktop), \$1,600

■ **Acer Aspire S7-392-6832** (13-inch laptop), \$1,000



INK THE DEAL

Need a printer? Don't just buy the cheapest one you can find. Monthly ink costs on certain models can really add up. These two are a great deal in the store and won't soak you with ink costs.



CANON MAXIFY MB5020

Price \$150

Why we like it This Canon produces low-cost but high-quality prints of photos and text. It's a wireless model, so you can print over your Wi-Fi network. Ink costs are reasonable at about \$4.40 per month. Many others can cost you \$7 or even more. It also has a built-in fax.

Bummers It's bulky and has no memory-card reader.



HP OFFICEJET PRO 251DW

Price \$230

Why we like it It doesn't have all of the features of an all-in-one, although its LCD screen can be used for quick photo editing. It prints high-quality photos and text, and does so quickly. It's a wireless model, so you can print over your Wi-Fi network. Ink costs are reasonable at \$4.30 per month.

Bummer It has no memory-card reader.

My best advice

Some final thoughts on getting the most out of your devices

OUR EXPERT



Donna Tapellini
electronics
editor

Because this is our last issue of ShopSmart, I wanted to leave you with some parting advice. So I polled my colleagues, and we came up with a list of our favorite tips to help you get the most out of your electronics.

Have some good, cheap fun. The great thing about apps is that some of the best ones are free. The most you'll pay is \$5 or \$6, tops. These are my all-time favorite iPhone apps: The Room and The Room Two make you solve puzzles to get out of—what else—the room. Yahtzee and

Boggle are great modern versions of old-fashioned games. Couch to 5K gets you moving and keeps you motivated. Food Network in the Kitchen is my go-to for great recipes.

Storm provides the most interesting weather info with great graphics. And Magic Puzzles has distracted me for hours with jigsaws.

For great photos, get up close. If you're shooting people, you'll capture a lot more emotion. If flowers or other smaller items are your subject, you'll get much more detail. For the latter, use the macro settings on your digital camera, or pick up an add-on macro lens for your smartphone.

Set up your new TV the right way. Manufacturers and retailers set up TVs to look best in huge, brightly lit stores, or they use energy-saver settings because they're running so many sets at the same time. But those settings just don't translate well when you get your new TV home. There's a lot to do here, but let's start with the easy one: Change the picture mode. That adjusts several settings at once. If your TV has a THX mode, try that first.

If not, Movie, Cinema, or Pro will get you the most natural-looking picture. Turn off dynamic backlight or contrast, and any power-saving controls. If the picture looks unnaturally smooth, turn off digital noise reduction.

Create an animated GIF.

Those staccato, short videos that keep repeating on your Facebook and Instagram feeds are animated GIFs. Most are silly, but beyond that, they can highlight touching moments such as a fleeting smile or hair blowing in the wind. It's easy to make an animated GIF. Take a series of pictures with burst mode, then string them together using Google Photos. That's it. Who knows—you could go viral!

Disconnect sometimes.

Take a break from your electronics, especially when you're on vacation. I know, there's no way you're leaving your phone behind. But see whether you can stick to using it just for pictures and dinner reservations. Because knowing when not to use your gadgets is just as important as knowing how to use them. Happy trails!

LIVE A LITTLE

Sometimes the best way to use your computer or smartphone is to know when NOT to use it.



THIS JUST IN

Tech news

Fight back against robocalls

It happens to everyone. You sit down to dinner and the phone rings, and a recorded voice says that you've won a cruise or it pitches a home-security system—even though you thought those kinds of calls were blocked when you signed up with the Do Not Call Registry. What gives?

Though legitimate marketers might honor the registry, it doesn't deter shady operators. But more help is on the way. A new ruling from the Federal Communications Commission, which cites robocalls as the top consumer gripe, pushes phone companies to give customers more call-blocking tools—and better ones. It also closes loopholes to make it harder for scammers to skip around the rules.

In the meantime, make sure you're taking advantage of the tools that are available now. Set your phone to automatically reject calls that block caller ID. On many home-phone systems, you do that

by pressing *77 (*87 turns it off). Check with your phone company to see how it works on your line.

Also consider a call-blocking system such as Nomorobo, which blocks "blacklisted" calls. It's available through VoIP providers including AT&T U-verse, Comcast Xfinity, Verizon FiOS, and Vonage. If you have a regular landline, you can buy a plug-in call blocker and set up a list of numbers you want to let through. Other calls won't ring unless callers confirm they're not a robot. (Consumer Reports is testing five of those products.) If you're not in the DNC Registry, sign up at donotcall.gov or 888-382-1222. If a robocaller sneaks through, file a complaint at that website. And join Consumers Union's campaign by going to endrobocalls.org.



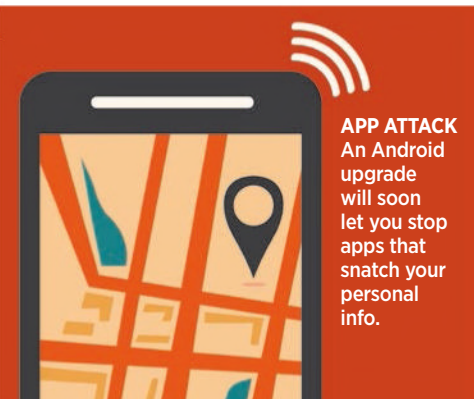
Don't want to talk to robots? Try a call-blocking system like Nomorobo.

HOW MUCH SPEED DO YOU NEED?

If you're catching up on "Veep" and the picture freezes or gets choppy, slow broadband could be the culprit. Experts say that you need a download speed of about 5 megabits per second to stream HD video—if that's the only thing going on. But you need about 25 Mbps if you and your hubby are streaming different movies while your game-obsessed teen battles aliens online. The cheapest plans don't give you anywhere near 25 Mbps—for example, 2 Mbps from Time Warner Cable (\$15 per month), and 3 Mbps from AT&T U-verse (\$30) and Comcast Xfinity (\$35). Such speeds are OK for occasional e-mail and the like, but not for streaming. Many providers offer 25 Mbps for \$50 or so per month and 50 Mbps for about \$10 more. Check your speed at speedtest.net. (Speeds can vary by the time of day; they tend to slow down at night when lots of local users are online.) If your broadband is poky, consider upgrading.

Protect your privacy with an 'M'

When an app on your Android phone or tablet wants to pry into your calendar, contacts, photos, or other stuff, you'll soon be able to tell it to mind its own business. M, a new version of Android expected this fall, will give you more control over permissions. Instead of forcing you to provide access to all of your data before you can download an app, it will let you allow or deny access as needed. For example, if a photo app wants to identify your location, you'll have a chance to say yes or no at that moment. M will also make it easy to see which apps have which permissions, so that you can change them if you want.



Best used cars under \$20k

Plus, how to spot a lemon

It's every used-car buyer's worst nightmare—ending up with gremlins under the hood. Carfax, the service that tracks vehicle histories, reports that about 20 percent of cars on the road have been damaged in some way. But the actual number is likely to be higher than that; not all damage turns up on Carfax reports. Hundreds of thousands of cars have been mangled by floods, hail, or storms. What's worse, there's a shadowy industry that rebuilds and resells those cars.

But you can outsmart used-car sellers. Whether you're buying from a dealer or a private seller, look over the vehicle carefully; you can learn a lot using just your eyes, ears, and nose, as you'll see in our guide at right. Dress in clothes that you don't mind getting dirty so that you can kneel on the ground to look underneath the car. Do your inspection in broad daylight, with the car on level ground, and ideally after it has been turned off for an hour or so. It's also worth paying \$100 or so to a qualified, independent mechanic to give the car a complete inspection.

Look for uneven panel gaps around the fenders, doors, hood, and trunk. They can indicate a shoddy repair.

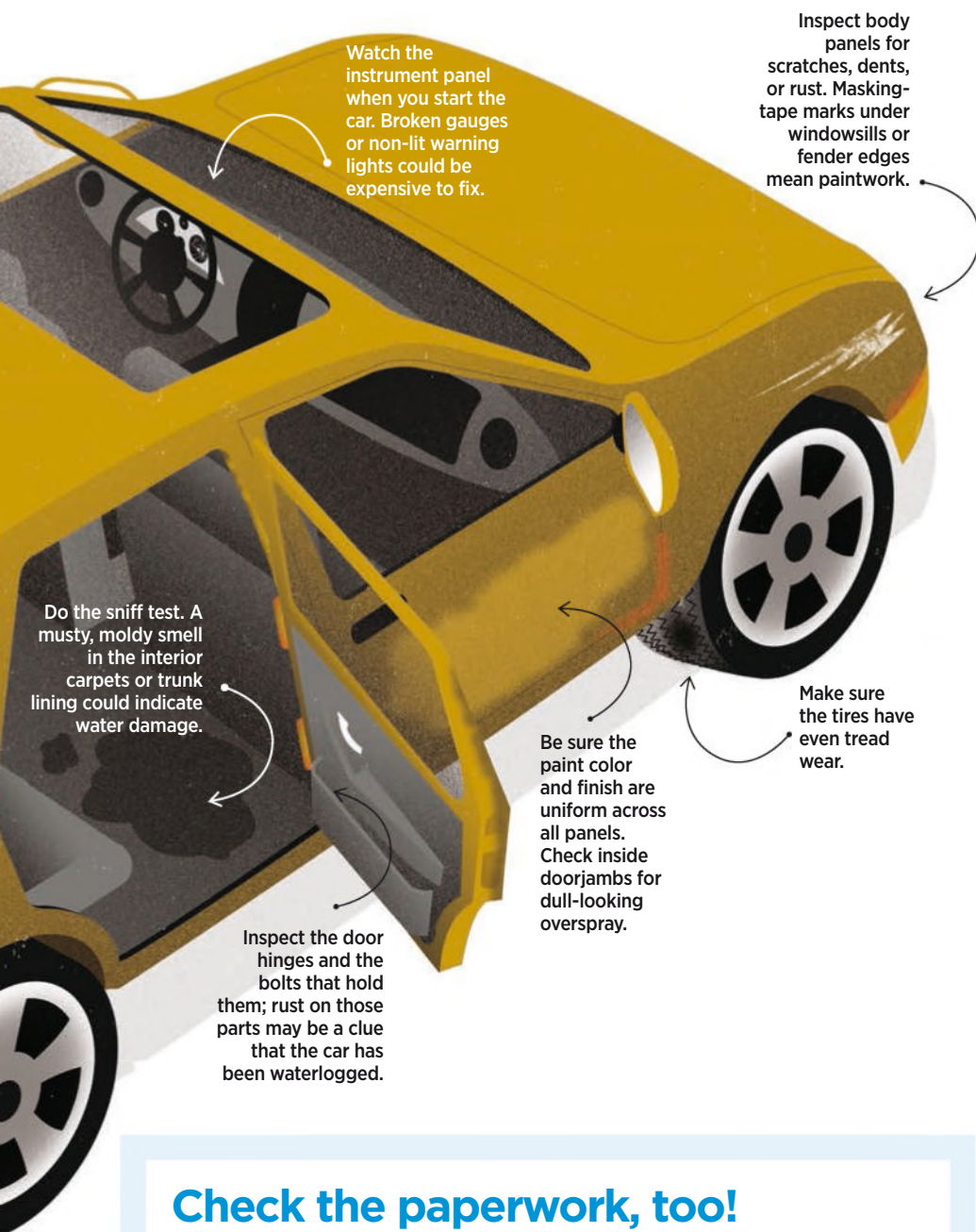
Check for moisture fogging in the lights, or for a water line, which could indicate previous flood damage.

Check the tailpipe for black, greasy residue. That means the engine is burning oil, an early sign of a future costly repair.

Run a magnet along doors and fenders. If the magnet doesn't pull toward the car, there may be body filler under the paint, indicating repairs.



ILLUSTRATION: NEIL WEBB



Check the paperwork, too!

You can learn a lot about a used car by reading its last title document. If the seller can't produce a proper title, you may want to move on.

■ First, check for words such as "Salvage," "Flood," "Branded," or "Rebuilt" on the title. The title can also tell you whether the car was owned by a fleet, whether it had more than one owner, and where it was based.

■ Ask for a Carfax or other vehicle history report. Follow the car's ownership history and trace its mileage to make sure there are no gaps. But keep in mind that neither a commercial history report nor a title shows a comprehensive look at the car's past.

■ Check the 17-digit VIN at safercar.gov for any unresolved recalls or service campaigns.

Top models

When friends and family ask which used cars to buy, our testers recommend the models below. They all performed well in our tests when they were new and have had above-average reliability for the model years listed, based on our annual survey of car owners. Each car offered electronic stability control as standard or available equipment, so look for models with that critical safety feature.

Less than \$10,000

- 2005 Acura TL
- 2005 Acura TSX
- 2005 Honda CR-V
- 2005 Honda Pilot
- 2006-08 Hyundai Sonata (4-cylinder)
- 2007-08 Kia Optima (4-cylinder)
- 2008 Mazda3 s
- 2007 Mitsubishi Outlander
- 2005-08 Pontiac Vibe
- 2005 Toyota Avalon
- 2007-09 Volkswagen Rabbit

\$10,000 to \$15,000

- 2005-06 Acura MDX
- 2005-06 Acura RL
- 2006-07 Infiniti G35
- 2010-12 Kia Soul
- 2010 Subaru Impreza
- 2005-07 Toyota Highlander

\$15,000 to \$20,000

- 2008-12 Honda Accord
- 2013-14 Honda Civic
- 2013-14 Hyundai Elantra
- 2007-08 Lexus ES
- 2006-08 Lexus RX
- 2010-12 Toyota Camry
- 2010-13 Toyota Prius
- 2009-11 Toyota RAV4

ConsumerReports® Build & Buy™ Car Buying Service

Save time and money with the **Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service**. Compare multiple dealers online and know what you should pay before visiting a dealership.



**Negotiation-free
guaranteed savings
off MSRP***



**Transparent
car buying
process**



**Consumer Reports
recommendation for
qualified vehicles**



**Nationwide
network of
dealers**

Buyers have
saved an average of
\$2,990
off MSRP**



See your savings!

www.ConsumerReports.org/cr/carsavings614ss

* Guaranteed Savings not available in all states. In these states, a "Target Price" is presented, which reflects a market-based example of what you can reasonably expect to pay for a vehicle with your desired options. Savings is guaranteed by the dealer and not Consumer Reports or TrueCar. Guaranteed Savings may not be available on select models or trims. See site for details.

** Between 4/1/14 and 6/30/14, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented by TrueCar Certified Dealers to users of the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service based on users who configured virtual vehicles and subsequently purchased a new vehicle of the same make and model listed on the certificate from Certified Dealers, was \$2,990 including applicable vehicle specific manufacturer incentives. Your actual savings may vary based on multiple factors including the vehicle you select, region, dealer, and applicable vehicle specific manufacturer incentives which are subject to change. The Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price ("MSRP") is determined by the manufacturer, and may not reflect the price at which vehicles are generally sold in the dealer's trade area as not all vehicles are sold at MSRP. Each dealer sets its own pricing. Your actual purchase price is negotiated between you and the dealer. Neither TrueCar nor Consumer Reports brokers, sells or leases motor vehicles. Service not available in Canada.

Save more on groceries

Free smartphone apps that make it super-easy

Couponing is like exercising—you know you should be doing it, but it can be difficult to stay motivated. Our advice: Stop trying so hard! With the latest crop of coupon apps, you can put couponing on autopilot. No wonder digital coupon use is growing rapidly, with more than 66 million paperless coupons redeemed in 2013, the most recent year information is available. And the face value of coupons is increasing, so you can save more with each one. The average savings is now \$1.72 per coupon, up from \$1.62 in 2013. Another change:

The Shrink app pays you back for buying the stuff you'd buy anyway, like these summer staples.



The first crop of apps helped you find coupons that would save you coins at the register, but now it's all about cash back. The latest apps encourage you to buy featured products and upload your receipts to redeem money on the back end. Read on to discover the latest and greatest apps, and find out how to get the most from your taps.

PRO TIPS

Upsize your savings by always doing these things:

1. CHECK DATES.

Digital coupons come with expiration dates. Cash-back offers usually have to be used within a specific time period, and you have to upload the coupon before the rebate disappears.

2. COMPARISON SHOP.

Check Favado (free for Android and Apple) to see where your grocery items are the cheapest, then use coupons there.

3. STACK THE SAVINGS.

Use manufacturer coupons (check newspaper inserts, the sites on page 82, and pgeveryday.com/tag/coupons), store reward club discounts, and mobile cash-back apps to maximize your savings.

4. KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS.

If your pictures are too blurry to read, you'll have to resubmit them before your receipts can be approved for cash back. Hold on to them until they're credited to your account.

New apps to tap

These apps might be babies in the couponing world, but they pack grown-up savings. They're all free, and each one meets our standards for service and contact info. Others to try include Jingit and Shopmium (for Android and Apple), which provide cash back for stuff you buy.

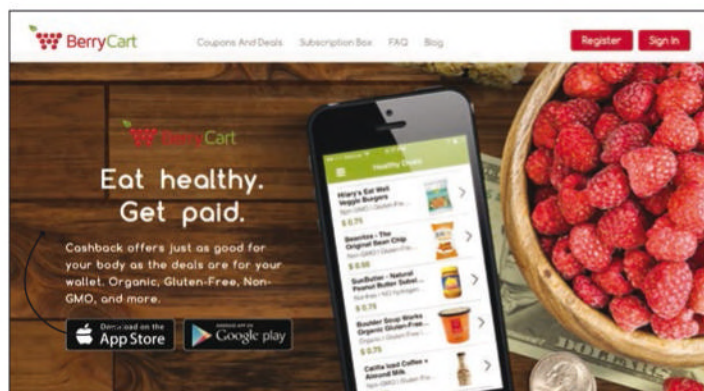


BerryCart

BEST FOR healthy eating.

Whether you're looking for organic, non-GMO, gluten-free, or vegan foods, download this app to access coupons for healthy fare. Learn about brands and new products via testimonials and quizzes, and share your new finds on Facebook to unlock exclusive rebates. Scan item bar codes to match them to discounts, buy them, then upload a photo of your receipt to earn cash back. You can collect your money via PayPal or opt to receive gift cards for Amazon, Starbucks, Target, and others. BerryCart works at more than 100,000 store locations, including Whole Foods. It can even be used online if you have a valid receipt to scan and submit. **Cool feature** The map function shows you the nearest store that has the items featured in the app.

Works on Android, Apple.



The Healthy Deals section is a good place to start. It offers savings on better-for-you choices.



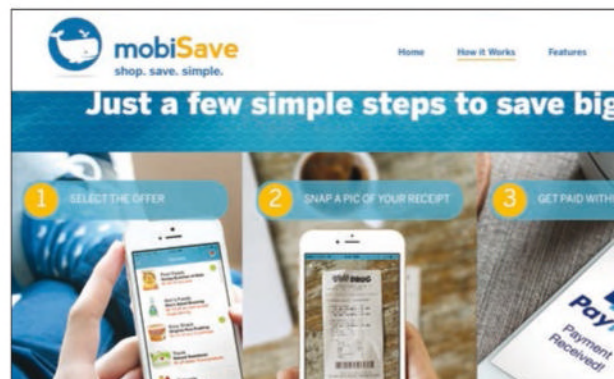
MobiSave

BEST FOR a quick payday.

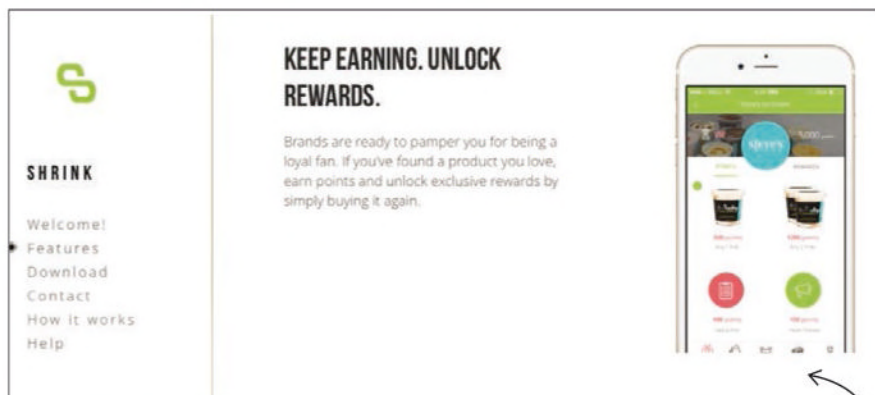
At press time, there was a waiting list for membership for this brand-new app. But once you make it beyond the velvet rope, you'll love how quickly it pays off. You select offers, buy the products, upload a picture of your receipt, then get your money added to your PayPal account within 24 hours. And you're not limited to specific stores; it works anywhere you get an itemized receipt.

Cool feature It even works in stores with spotty phone service and no Wi-Fi. Just load your offers at home and you can access them offline.

Works on Apple.



Sign up now and be one of the first shoppers to get in on the action.



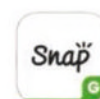
Shrink BEST FOR repeat shoppers.

It's all about being rewarded for product loyalty. Once you discover a brand you love, just tap "Add" to activate a loyalty membership and access exclusive rebate offers you can redeem at local stores. Boost your savings by engaging with the brands (watching video clips or telling your friends about them, for example). Many apps let you redeem an offer only once, but Shrink rewards you for buying multiples. Accumulate \$20 and you can cash out via PayPal. The app includes savings that aren't tied to a particular brand and offers savings on basics like strawberries and apples.

Cool feature Shrink deals can be stacked on top of manufacturer coupons for even more savings.

Works on Android, Apple.

Shrink pays you more for buying in bulk.

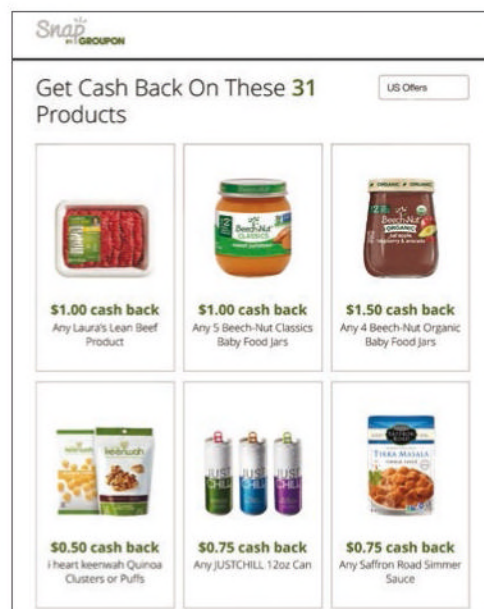


Snap by Groupon BEST FOR customized offers.

This Groupon offshoot promises to send you money for buying everything from baby food to soda. Invite friends to earn a referral fee, but you might not see the same offers—yours are tailored to your location. Much like a regular Groupon offer, deals can sell out, so it pays to move quickly.

Cool feature Earn even more; refer friends and receive \$1 the first time each one redeems an offer.

Works on Android, Apple.



Touch 'Deals' to see all of the available offers at a store.

Tap a deal for details, such as how many offers are left and how many times you can redeem them.

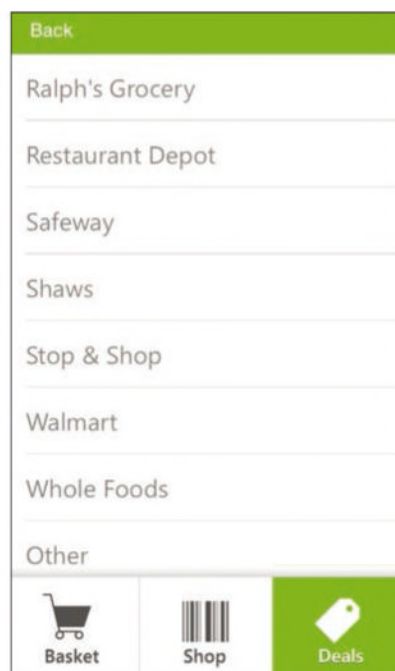


Swift Shopper BEST FOR the time-strapped.

Use this one to save time and money. Just scan bar codes or enter product names manually to create your grocery list, then use your phone to scan products as you add them to your cart. You earn store deals and rack up rewards coupons as you shop. When you reach the register, the cashier just scans your phone for checkout—no need to load up the conveyor belt.

Cool feature Add your loyalty cards to unlock additional savings. The app works with Harris Teeter, Safeway, Stop & Shop, Walmart, and more.

Works on Android, Apple.



NOTE: Anytime you access services online, vendors might share your information with third parties. So read privacy policies carefully to see what your options are for limiting sharing.

3 more apps we love

Here are some great new features rolled out by apps we have recommended in past issues:



CHECKOUT 51

It provides rebates for purchasing specific items each week.

What's new Users can now claim some offers more than once for cash back. And the Stars feature makes it easier to track the offers you want to redeem in stores and see how much you'll save before you even reach checkout.

Works on Android, Apple.

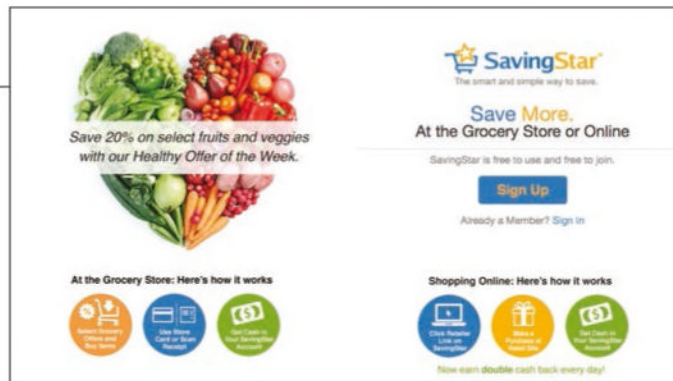


GROCERY IQ

Create a shopping list and find coupons for every item, right on your phone.

What's new Now you can scan bar codes to add items to your list. The app also allows you to sync lists on multiple devices.

Works on Android, Apple.



SavingStar helps you save whether you're shopping for groceries in a store or online.



SAVINGSTAR

Earn cash back by linking it to your loyalty cards or sending copies of your receipts.

What's new The app now lets you watch videos about brands or share your e-mail address with them to earn even more on your purchases. It has also added more grocery partners.

Works on Android, Apple.

Also check these sites

Prefer to find your digital coupons via computer? These websites are loaded with savings.

Coupons.com

BEST FOR printable coupons.

Launched in 2001, this website is the granddaddy of coupon sites. Many others (including Coupon Sherpa and ECoupons) pull their offers directly from here. There were \$760 worth of coupons available when we checked, and the site claims to have them for more than 2,000 brands. You can print from the site and even add some offers directly to your linked store loyalty cards. It also has an app, which is free for Android and Apple devices.

Hopster

BEST FOR saving your way.

This newcomer promises exclusive coupons for everything from frozen food to cleansers. Boost the value of your coupons by doing tasks like watching videos, signing up for newsletters, and "liking" brands on Facebook. Earn bonuses by uploading receipts showing that you used its coupons.

Lozo

BEST FOR letting the savings come to you.

Just enter your grocery list and the site claims it will search more than 400 coupon sites and e-mail you links

to the ones that will knock money off your bill. You can even enter your brand preferences to find exactly what you want. Or you can use the search feature to uncover your own deals. Either way, print them to save at the register.



If you're just not that into coupons, you'll love Lozo because it finds the deals for you.

Our parting ShopSmart tips

Keep your coupons where you'll remember to grab them. I pin mine to a bulletin board in the kitchen to keep them in plain sight.
—Julie

Don't be afraid to speak up and ask for a better price. I used to be too shy, but now I do it all the time.
—Sue

Splurge if you can afford to, but remember: Sometimes a cheap product will do the job just as well!
—Scott

Shop online! No more rummaging through messy racks only to find your size is sold out—you can easily sort by size, color, price. And cool new companies are opening up shop all the time.
—Jody

Never go to the food store hungry. Bring a list and stick to it. And don't forget your supermarket rewards card! Those three things save me \$100 per month, at least.
—Tim

Always check return policies before you buy to make sure you're not stuck with something you don't want.
—Karen

Talk your way into a better car deal. Throw out a number and be prepared to walk away if they don't meet it. It's always worked for me.
—Melissa

Don't leave a store until you've checked your smartphone for a coupon. It drives my husband crazy, but I live by that. Coupon Sherpa and RetailMeNot are two sites I like.
—Lisa

I've become a big label reader. It may slow me down when I shop, but I want to know what's in the food I'm buying for my family. If I see trans fats, I put it back.
—Tammy

backinthe**day**

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE WOMEN'S PRODUCTS THROUGH THE YEARS

PLEASE TWEEZE ME!
In the 1940s, cutting-edge hair-removal options included the "invariably dangerous" X-ray method and "highly toxic" chemicals.

1946



1984



SHAMPOO OR DISH SOAP?
Our testers sussed up with both, and many actually liked the dish detergent better.

HAIR TESTED HERE
Do volumizing shampoos work? These locks still looked pretty limp to us!



2000

1950



FEELING WRUNG-OUT
This washing machine was cutting edge in 1950. And you thought you had it bad!

GO AHEAD, MAKE MY DAY!

This shoulder-holster model from GE will blow you away.

1962



Getting hosed
Gives new meaning to the word blowout!

1961





1938

SHOCKING LOCKS

Getting a perm was a hair-raising experience in the 1930s. Then there was the price: more than \$300 in today's dollars.



1970

HOLY ROLLERS!
No one ever said beauty was going to be easy.



PORT-A-PAMPERER

Who needs to go to a spa when you can wear one?

1960s

1970



1974

WE'RE NO VOGUE!

But our testers covered many important fashion trends, from panty hose and paper frocks to poufed dresses and platform shoes.

1958



Illustrated by Andy Warhol (really!).

1966



Geek chic

Long before Google Glass made us look silly, there was this Panasonic stereo radio headset.



1970



Gone shopping!

ShopSmart